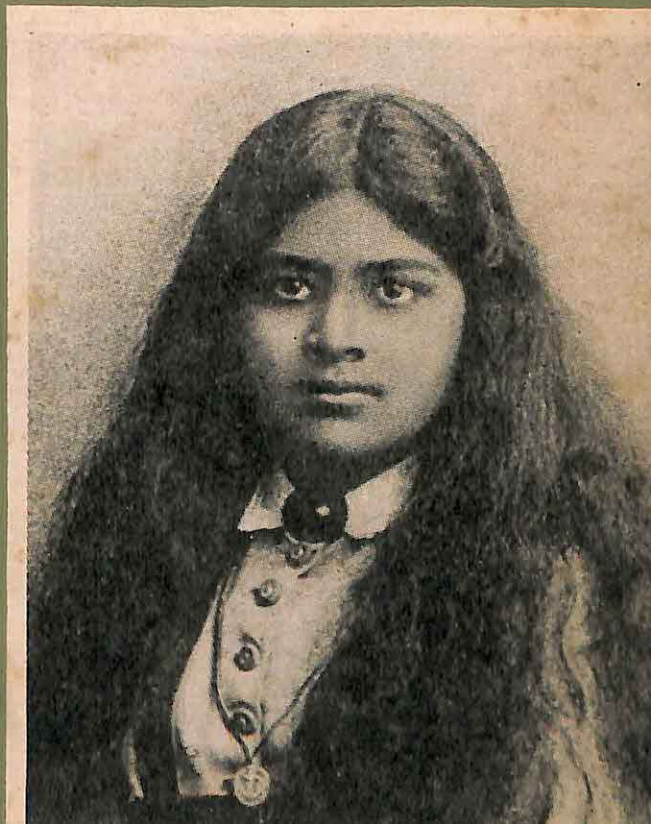




# Toru Dutt

Padmini Sen Gupta

*Makers of  
Indian  
Literature*



Although she died at twenty-one, Toru Dutt placed her country in the international map of letters. A linguistic prodigy, she wrote creatively both in English and French, neither of which was her mother tongue. Her roots were, however, planted deeply in the traditions and culture of India and in Sanskrit literature.

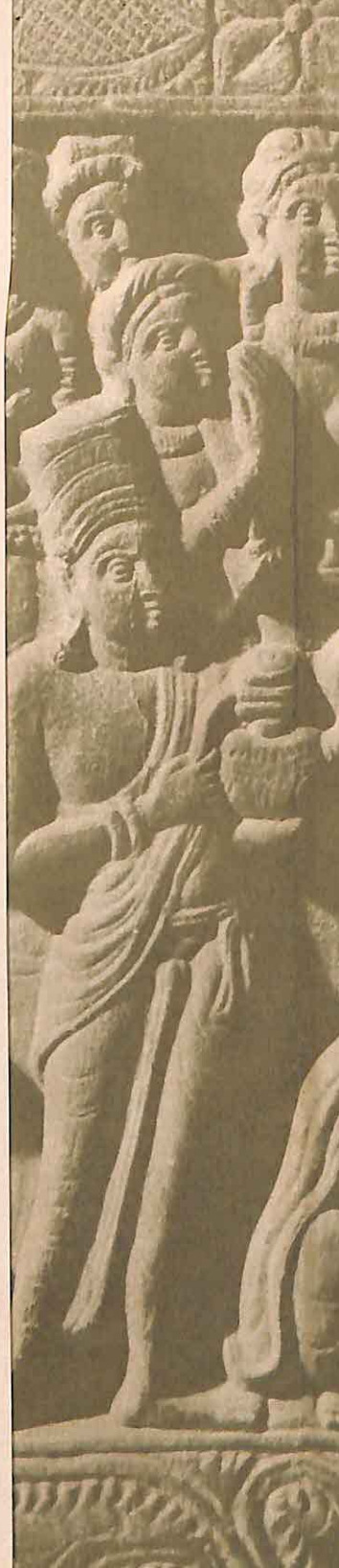
Padmini Sen Gupta, among her many publications, has written a number of biographies, including those of *Sarojini Naidu*, *Deshapriya J. M. Sen Gupta* and *Pandita Ramabai* (under publication).

Her study of Toru Dutt brings vividly to mind the life of 'a daughter of the green valley of the Ganges', 'a fragile exotic blossom of songs', who, by 'sheer force of native genius earned for herself the right to be enrolled in the great fellowship of English poets.'

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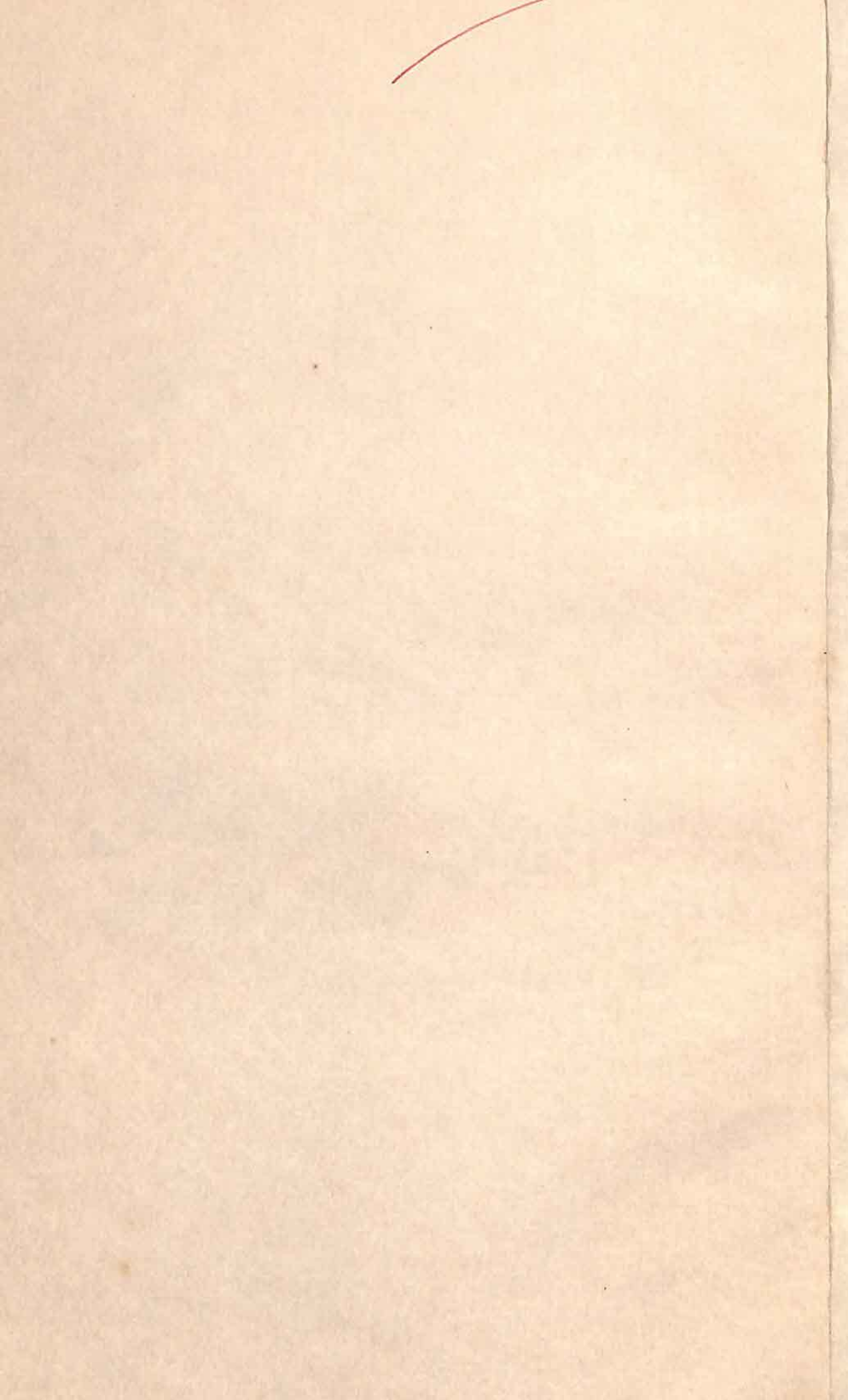
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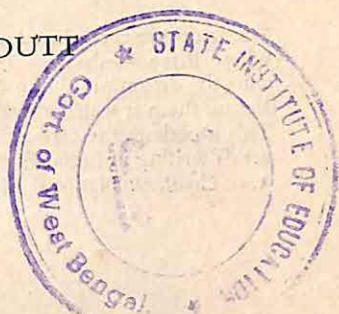






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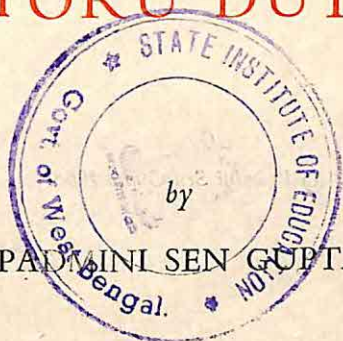
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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India. From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A. D. *Courtesy*: National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

TORU DUTT



PADMINI SEN GUPTA

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SAHITYA AKADEMI

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Rabindra Bhavan, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi-1  
Rabindra Sarobar Stadium, Block 5B, Calcutta-29  
14, Cathedral Garden Road, Madras-34

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*First Published 1968*

30.6.2008  
13472

295A



Published by Sahitya Akademi and printed by S. C. Ghose at  
Calcutta Press Private Limited, 1 Raja Subodh Mullick  
Square, Calcutta-13.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My profound thanks are due to Shri Y. M. Mulay, Ex-Librarian and his Assistants of the National Library, Calcutta; to Shri P. S. Hemmady for his help in lending me a most valuable book; to Miss Najoo Bilimoria for so kindly referring me to many articles on Toru Dutt; to Shri Sitesh Sircar and Prof. Trilochan Das and many other friends.

Burnpur  
21 August 1968

PADMINI SEN GUPTA



## i. A Child of the International World

THERE are some writers who belong to the world in general, irrespective of whether or not their medium of expression is their mother tongue. They may be born in any country, the stamp of which they will always bear, but they are universal in their creative output.

Toru Dutt was one such prodigy. Though she was always identified with India, and as a daughter of the 'green valley of the Ganges', her mind was unclouded by narrow national or linguistic inhibitions or mental barriers. Happily true to herself, she delved into the treasures of English and French literatures, the two foreign tongues in which she was educated, and acknowledged without reserve her debt to the countries which inspired her. She placed her country, and was among the first to do so, on the international map of letters. Neither was she one jot the less patriotic because she did not write in Bengali.

She was born in a period of Indian history which was overshadowed by Macaulay's Minute and Lord William Bentinck's ruling of 1835, promoting European education among the 'natives' and channelling all educational funds towards the use of 'English Education alone'. The learning of English was compulsory, and the people, not realizing the enormity of the 'crime' of foreign rulers forcing their tongue on those they ruled, took it as a matter of course that all educated Indians should learn English. Toru Dutt, therefore, did not have to apologize to those Pundits who claim that mother tongues are the only languages which creative writers should use. She, nevertheless, was not slow to realize that her own oriental background of literature was so precious that she would have to commingle it with her earlier abundant knowledge of French and English. She soon began to educate herself, with her father's help, in Sanskrit.

Given time, Toru would certainly have become more and more Indian in her creative writing, but this 'fragile exotic blossom of song' was snatched away too soon. Even in her short life, however, she gave positive proof that she was gradually becoming more and more fascinated with her own country's heritage 'and would have shown us Christian thought and feeling, not as something alien but as truly belonging to Him in Whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, English nor Bengali'.<sup>1</sup>

The saddest memory of Toru is in what 'might have been', a thought she so prophetically expressed when she commented on her sister Aru's premature death in the famous words:

Of all sad words of tongue and pen  
The saddest are these—it might have been.

Though Toru died at the age of twenty-one, it would not be correct to say, as one critic did, that all her writings being in English or French, 'this bilingual spirit adds to her tragedy of being in a way outlandish as well as almost forsaken. If she deserves to be rescued from this oblivion—which she really does, it must be a careful task for her rescuer; for he would find that Toru herself chose an alien soil twice removed from her original motherland.'<sup>2</sup>

Toru actually has never been 'forsaken'. There is hardly another English writer in India who is so regularly remembered in the journals and newspapers of the country. In India's *Who's Who* she is marked among the great. Neither are her biographers in Bengali, French and English scarce. She has passed the test of time and, though born over more than a hundred years ago, is still very much alive, proving herself a classic writer.

Having commanded so much popularity with what she left behind, one wonders what greatness she would have achieved if given more time. Or would her talent and keen scholarship have dwindled? Was she a brilliant prodigy extinguished too soon, or would she, if she had lived longer, lost the freshness of youth which her writings evinced up to the age of twenty-one? As it is, her output is too slight to class her among the



great writers. In judging Toru one always thinks of her whole life, with its tragedies and brief years, her poetry and scholarship, as part of a whole poem. Her letters and friendships also contribute to this assessment, for her life and her work cannot be separated. Her poems alone, without being associated with her life, may not have stood the test of time; but the two together certainly presented a young woman of exceptional worth. One could almost wonder, with Wilfred Owen, whether Toru's 'poetry is in the pity' of her life.

Some critics even think that Toru's poetry is appreciated because it is so closely associated with her sad life. 'Beauty and tragedy and fatality criss-crossed in the life of Toru Dutt and it is difficult, when talking about her poetry, to make any nice distinction between poetry and what C.S. Lewis would call "poetolatry". . . . When we read Emily Brontë's poems or her novel, *Wuthering Heights*, speculation starts and makes all kinds of guesses, and the "might have beens" both fascinate and depress us. So it is with Toru. . . Toru came across a poem that she herself may have sung in the first instance,—then was the translation most tremblingly articulate, as, for example, "My Vocation" by Béranger—

A waif on this earth  
Sick, ugly and small,  
Condemned from my birth  
And rejected by all.  
From my lips broke a cry,  
Such as anguish may wring;  
Sing, said God in reply,  
Chant, poor little thing.

Suffering and the dark image of an incomprehensible fatality were Toru's 'shadow-companions.' But the same critic also insists that 'The poetry is the reality, no doubt, but the poet too compels attention.'<sup>3</sup>

Toru was a 'linguistic prodigy', and performed the tricks of a magician by the use of three languages, translating into one from another. After having mastered French and English, she



plunged into learning Sanskrit and was able to read and translate from it in ten months. She wrote a letter to her English friend, Mary Martin, regarding her determination to probe into India's classical literature: 'I should so like to read the glorious epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, in the original. I shall be quite a Sanskrit Pundit when I revisit old Cambridge. Ah! I so long to be there!' Toru frequently expressed her longing for the freedom of life abroad. But she reverts quickly to her Indian environment. 'Sanskrit is not too difficult to read and understand for one who knows Bengali.' It is obvious therefore that Toru could speak Bengali quite fluently, though she never mastered its script, for in the one extant Bengali letter she wrote, her handwriting is childish and faulty, and she spells her own name wrong.

Though she only started Sanskrit in December 1875, by September 1876 Toru makes the astounding remark to Mary: 'I hope I shall be able to bring out another *Sheaf*, not gleaned in French but in Sanskrit fields . . . I have only as yet gathered two ears.' *The Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* appeared in print posthumously in 1878. The alchemy of change now becomes obvious in Toru's outlook. From French and English interests she becomes more and more engrossed in India. The *Ballads*—'the most mature of her writings'—are of Indian themes and it is in these that she excels. Here 'we see Toru no longer attempting vainly, though heroically, to compete with European literature on its own ground, but turning to the legends of her own race and country for inspiration. No modern Oriental has given us so strange an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic as is presented in the stories of "Prehlad" and of "Savitri", or so quaint a piece of religious fancy as the ballad of "Jogadhya Uma"'. The poetess seems in these verses to be chanting to herself those songs of her mother's race to which she always turned with tears of pleasure.'<sup>4</sup> Critics have commented again and again on her pure Hindu qualities and of her being a 'landmark in the history of the progress of culture.'

Toru, then, was a young genius, a great lover of France and England, a connoisseur of the languages of both these countries,



but an Indian at heart in her imagery, her thinking and her personality. France she loved second to India, and England she wished to settle in because she felt women were allowed more freedom there than in India. Most of the women in Bengal in the middle of the nineteenth century were very much in purdah, and Toru often felt the restrictions hampered the freedom she so appreciated when abroad. She therefore fitted into an international world happily and welded the Christian religion into her Hindu background. Here perhaps lay her richest claim. She did not, I think, feel, as Gosse did, that 'faith itself in Vishnu and Siva had been cast aside with childish things and been replaced by a purer faith.' Though she felt she had imbibed a more personally satisfying religion—her serene faith in Christ was what made her face her pain and early death with such peace—she never felt that Vishnu and Siva were 'childish things'. She turned to Hindu mythology so avidly because she felt a deep respect for Hindu gods, heroes and heroines, as she so frequently reiterated. In fact, Gosse himself in the latter part of his introductory memoir, remarks that Toru's Ballads 'breathe a Vedic solemnity and simplicity of temper, and are singularly devoid of littleness and frivolity.' The past Vedic gods also fascinated her.

Toru interplayed the culture of her land with that of England and France. By 'sheer force of native genius [she] earned for herself the right to be enrolled in the great fellowship of English poets.'<sup>5</sup> Her 'precocious craftsmanship' was amazing and she taught the world that it belonged to one family of God.

James Darmesteter, the French writer and critic, commented: 'This daughter of Bengal, so admirably and so strangely gifted, Hindu by race and tradition, an English woman by education, a French woman at heart, poet in English, prose-writer in French; who at the age of eighteen made India acquainted with the poets of France in the rhyme of England, who blended in herself three souls and three traditions, and died at the age of twenty (*sic*), in the full bloom of her talent and on the eve of the awakening of her genius, presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel.'<sup>6</sup>

## 2. The Background in Bengal

THE conquest of Bengal by the British did not raise as great a voice of dissent from the people as might have been expected. Its main repercussion was the ushering in of a revolution in thoughts and ideals. It coupled Bengal with Britain, and many Bengalis felt that a renaissance was necessary, even though with a foreign complexion, to awaken a sleeping India. The war of American Independence, the French Revolution, which proved to be so forceful an influence on Toru's thinking and writing, the advance of science, the rich heritage of English and French literature suddenly made available to India, the positivism, utilitarianism, Darwinism and the peculiar intellectual but puritan charm of Victorian life—all directly influenced India, and in particular, Bengal.

It was Raja Rammohun Roy, the dynamic 'Father of Modern India' with his contact with Europe and his great love for India, who began to instil new life into the country. He started the modern trend in literature of a marriage between the East and the West, and his religious and social reforms, his concern at the wrongs meted out to women and his intense interest in the freedom movements of the West had their direct impact on India. It is said that he jumped so high with joy on seeing the French flag of Liberty that he broke his leg! He himself was the forerunner of a tremendous literary and religious awakening and reform in the country. Around him was centred the whole of the rebirth of Bengal in the intellectual, religious and social fields of progress.

In 1817, the Hindu College was started in Calcutta by some Bengali reformers and philanthropists with the help of their British well-wishers. It had a hundred students, and was the first Anglo-Bengali institution. The next year saw the Serampore



College inaugurated by Carey, Ward and Marshman, those intrepid missionaries who devoted their lives to the regeneration of Bengal. Dr Duff became the Principal and later David Lester Richardson occupied this important position. Carey was a great friend of Nilmoni Dutt, a patriach of the Dutt family and Toru's great-grandfather. He belonged to the educated Indians of the latter part of the 18th century shortly after the foundation of the British Raj in Bengal. Along with Raja Rammohun Roy and others he mixed freely with missionaries. So great was the influence of the latter on Indian life that the new intellectual movement became associated with Christianity, and Raja Rammohun Roy himself learnt Hebrew and Greek in order to read the Bible in the original. In fact the learning of foreign languages was so popular that Greek, Latin, French and German were assiduously studied by the intellectual giants of the day.

Nilmoni succoured Carey from the authorities of the East India Company (at the time missionaries were not encouraged to enter India) and sheltered the famous missionary in his home. Carey was destitute; his wife was insane and his children ill. The help given to him by a Hindu gentleman was never forgotten, and Carey found a happy home in Nilmoni's house, Rambagan, in Manicktolla Street. This house later became the home of Toru. Nilmoni belonged to a well-to-do and tolerant Hindu family; he performed his Pujas lavishly and spent so much money on alms and charity that he soon became penniless. In his turn Carey is said to have helped Nilmoni when the latter was in dire need. The connection of Toru's family with missionaries and English enthusiasts thus began three generations before Toru was born.

Writing in English soon began to fascinate Indians, and among the first poets of the day was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) who from the position of a clerk rose to be a teacher of English in the Hindu college. His mother was an Indian, and his father Portuguese. His best known verses are the *Fakir of Jungheera and other Poems*. David Lester Richardson, Principal of the Hindu College, edited the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* and



must have greatly encouraged this early Indo-English poet. Richardson's *Literary Leaves* exerted a profound influence on Bengali contemporary writers. Toru wrote an article about Derozio in the *Bengal Magazine* of December 1874. Kasi Prasad Ghosh followed Derozio and became the first Bengali to write poems in English. He published the *Shair and other Poems* in 1830. Other writers of Anglo-English literature before 1835 were Mohan Lal, Hasan Ali and P. Rajagopal. Raj Narain Dutt dedicated *Osmyn, an Arabian Tale* to Richardson in 1841. He wrote it in heroic couplets in rather an archaic style.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-1873) was also educated in the Hindu College. Both Kasi Prasad and Raj Narain had preceded Michael who was Richardson's favourite pupil. He embraced Christianity in 1843 and stayed for a few years at the Bishop's College, Calcutta, and then went to Madras in 1849. He first wrote in English, but later changed to his mother tongue and became an outstanding Bengali poet and dramatist.

In July 1876, Toru, writing to her English friend Mary Martin mentions Michael and says that the journal *Bengalee* in reviewing her *Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, which had just been published, had praised her culture which 'was very rare even among our best educated men', but had mistakenly connected her as belonging to Michael Madhusudan Dutt's family. Toru says: 'The Michael M. S. Dutt mentioned in the last notice is not related to us in any way, though the critic seems to think so.' Michael came originally from village Sagardari in Jessore District.

In 1851 Hur Chunder Dutt, Toru's uncle, produced a small volume called *Fugitive Poems*, and also *Writings, Spiritual, Moral and Poetic*, while Girish Chunder, another uncle of Toru's, wrote *Cherry Blossoms*. These writers later contributed to the *Dutt Family Album* more popularly known as the D.F.A., published in 1870 by Toru's father Govin Chunder Dutt. It appeared in London and contained poems also by his nephew Omesh Chunder Dutt and himself. The publishers were Longmans Green. The book was received with lukewarm praise, though it did not fail to interest writers in Bengal. Apart from the fact that it proved the craving for the Dutt family to write



poetry in English, it achieved little literary worth. But it was the first anthology of English verse by Bengalis and represented the 'older school of Bengali poetry in English', like Michael Madhusudan's *Captive Ladie*. Neither Toru's nor Aru's verses appear in the D.F.A., for the girls, in England at the time, could not have started seriously to write poetry. They seemed to have considered publication only after their return to India in 1873, when they immediately plunged into writing for the *Bengal Magazine*. They had, however, started translating French verses into English in England.

Govin Chunder wrote 66 poems in the D.F.A. and Omesh 73, out of a total of 197. Govin evinced a quaint style which belonged to the 17th century. The *Album* served 'not only as a memorial of a gifted family, but as a testimony to the character and influence of those English teachers who were the first to encourage the higher learning of English in the city of Calcutta.' Toru thought much of the *Album* and when her friend Mary Martin's review of the *Sheaf* was refused by the *Queen* magazine, Toru wrote: 'How tiresome that the *Queen* refused your notice, dear. But never mind, I never thought much of the *Queen*. It did not notice the *Dutt Family Album* very favourably.' Another poet of the family was Soshee Chunder Dutt, uncle of Romesh Chunder Dutt, the renowned writer and cousin of Govin. He produced a book in 1878 called *The Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems* (Thacker Spinck). Romesh Chunder Dutt was of course the most famous of the Dutt family of writers. A second cousin of Toru's, he moved close to the family and greatly admired the talent of Toru and her sister Aru.

The 19th century not only introduced English into India, but proved to be the most fertile century for the growth of intellectual reform and religious reorganization. At this time also, Europeans began to probe deep into Sanskrit literature and were fascinated by the depth of Indian learning. The birth, earlier, of the Royal Asiatic Society in Calcutta and the deep study of Indian classics by Sir William Jones, John Wilson, Sir Edwin Arnold, and Sir William Hunter, to mention but a few, had created a profound interest abroad in India in her great



and ancient past. Toru thus lived in an age of productive and fertile awakening, and proved herself to be a brilliant and constant star which shone not only in her time, but illuminates the literary scene even today, a century after her birth.

### 3. The Dutts of Rambagan

THE Dutts came originally from Ajapur, in the Burdwan District of Bengal. They were Kayastha by caste. Nilmoni was born on January 3, 1757. An outstanding personality, he proved to be a fountainhead of inspiration to his offsprings. While one part of his family had settled in Burdwan, Nilmoni's father moved to Rambagan in Calcutta, where he soon earned for himself the name of a broad-minded intellectual. His generosity and hospitality attracted many to his home, and friends flocked around him, enjoying his broad tolerant views.

Nilmoni had three sons, Rasamoy, Harish and Pitambar. Govin Chunder was Rasamoy's third son, and Toru's father. His other sons were Kishen Chunder, Koilash Chunder, Hur Chunder and Girish Chunder. Pitambar had two sons, Ishan Chunder and Soshee Chunder. Romesh Chunder Dutt, the well-known Indologist and writer was Ishan's son. To this day Romesh Chunder's house stands near the original Rambagan with the inscription on the entrance door:

R. C. Dutt I.C.S., C.I.E.  
a distinguished man of letters lived in  
this house from 1848-1872.

Romesh Chunder's nephew, Ashoke Dutt, still lives in the famous house.

Rasamoy Dutt, Toru's grandfather, was an enthusiastic pupil of English literature and also an economist. The British naturally welcomed his enthusiasm for their language and encouraged him to spread his knowledge to other Bengalis. He was given the post of Honorary Secretary of the Hindu College Committee and later rose to be a Judge of the Small Causes Court, and the Commissioner to the Court of Requests. Romesh Chunder



Dutt says of Rasamoy: 'He had a splendid collection of English books in his house and infused in his sons that strong partiality for English literature,'<sup>1</sup> which was inherited by his granddaughters. Unlike his father Nilmony, Rasamoy opposed expensive Pujas which had impoverished his father. Therefore the orthodox Brahmins disliked him. He died on May 14, 1854, two years before Toru was born. He had read the Bible and had persuaded all the ladies in his house to write out the Psalms in Bengali. Scott's *Commentary* was their guide.

The story of the conversion of the Dutt family to Christianity is interesting. Details are given in a letter written by Mr S.W. Mackay, dated June 29, 1854. When Rasamoy died and was being cremated, his eldest son Kishen was taken ill. Soon he developed a fever and died. After his death, Girish, his youngest brother, sent for a missionary, Ogilvy Temple. Dr. Mackay could not go to Girish's house as he was ill, but persuaded Mr Ewart to accompany Ogilvy Temple to see Girish and his brothers. Girish told the missionaries that his eldest brother Kishen had seen a vision of the other world before he died and believed in Christianity and wanted to be baptised. The bringing in of the missionaries to the bedside of the dying man had been opposed and Girish himself had baptised Kishen, though he was a Hindu, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Kishen had then called his family around him and bore dying testimony to Christ and he sought his family to become Christians.

Dr Mackay says that the brothers, after the death of their father and eldest brother, discussed the pros and cons of becoming Christians. The wives were against this family conversion but agreed to stand by their husbands. That there was a delay of eight years before the Dutt became Christians in 1862 was possibly due to the objections of the ladies and the Hindu community. Govin Chunder had married Kshetramoni Mitter, daughter of Babu Brindaban Mitter. She was well-versed in Bengali and the Hindu scriptures, myths and legends. It was due to her gentle influence in the home, her songs and gift of story-telling that Toru imbibed so deep a love for the ancient



ballads of India. Toru wrote to Mlle Clarisse Bader, her French friend: 'When I hear my mother sing, in the evenings, the old songs of the country, I weep almost always.'

Though Kshetramoni was baptised with Govin Chunder and her children in 1862, together with the other Dutt brothers and their wives, the women still retained their Hindu faith; but Kshetramoni later became a most ardent Christian, and as a family, Govin Chunder, his wife and children practised the deepest faith in Christianity. But for a while, Govin seemed, to have feared an estrangement from his wife and wrote a poem which was included in the *Dutt Family Album*. It voiced to a certain extent his anxiety. The first verse is as follows:

Nay, part not so—one moment stay,  
 Repel me not with scorn.  
 Like others, wilt thou turn away,  
 And leave me quite forlorn?  
 Wilt thou too join the scoffing crowd,  
 The cold, the heartless, and the proud,  
 Who curse the hallowed morn  
 When, daring idols to disown,  
 I knelt before the Saviour's throne?

When Kshetramoni married Govin Chunder she knew little English; but later she became fluent enough in the language to translate a book entitled *The Blood of Jesus* from English into Bengali, which was published by the Tract and Book Society of Calcutta. She long survived her short-lived family, and lived to be 'a true Saint of God'. She died in 1900.

Kshetramoni was responsible, almost as much as her husband, for the influence she wielded on her daughters. Bishop Clifford, writing to Harihar Das regarding the Dutts, remarked: 'I learned to realize that if Toru inherited her rich intellectual gifts from her father's side of the family, she must have received the moral beauty and sweetness of her character largely from her mother'.<sup>2</sup>

Govin Chunder was large-hearted, with a deep sympathy for others and free of prejudice and any form of intolerance.

Of the five sons of Rasamoy, Govin became the most celebrated. He joined the Hindu College in 1836 and became Professor David Lester Richardson's favourite pupil, though Michael Madhusudan Dutt held this coveted place later. Govin also took part in theatricals and learnt how to recite Shakespeare from his teacher, who had a wholesome influence on him. Among other pupils of the popular Professor Richardson were Peary Charan Sircar, Gaganendra Mohun Tagore, Bhudeb Mookherjee, and Bholanath Chunder. In fact, the Hindu College produced a galaxy of writers and thinkers of the time.

Govin Chunder dabbled in writing from an early age and published a small volume of verse which had an appreciative review in *Blackwood's Magazine*. *The Calcutta Review* of December 1948 also commended these verses and they were later, together with others, absorbed in the D.F.A.

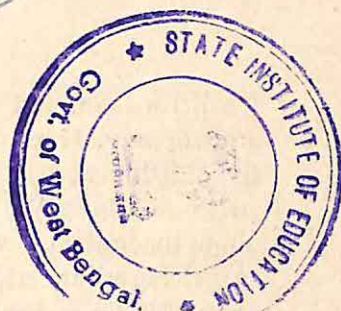
After his studies, Govin Chunder joined Government service and later rose to be Assistant Comptroller General of Accounts. Since he had the temerity to protest that Bengalis were being overlooked, he was transferred to Bombay, where he took his family. But soon he resigned as he received no promotion and was obviously ignored owing to his previous protest in Bengal. He was now free to devote his time to literary and religious pursuits, and being well-to-do, did not mind being unemployed.

Romesh Chunder Dutt wrote, soon after Govin and his family returned from England in 1873: "They were as kind, as gracious, as courteous towards me as ever, and their hearts were full of piety. But the fatal illness of which the germs were brought from England declared itself; first the eldest, Aru, and then the talented Toru, fell ill and died. Toru's verses were praised in England by Edmund Gosse, and admired by a select circle of readers: had she lived to a maturer age, she might have left a name in English literature. Govin Chunder survived them a few more years and his widow followed him after some more years."



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#### 4. Childhood



TORU was born in her father's house in Rambagan, 12 Manicktola Street, in the heart of Calcutta. Govin Chunder had three children; Abju, born October 18, 1851 (died July 7, 1865); Aru, born September 13, 1854 (died July 23, 1874); and Toru, born March 4, 1856 (died August 30, 1877).

The Dutt family, along with the children, were baptised in the Christ Church, Cornwallis Square, Calcutta, in 1862. Soon after this important event, Toru was playing with Aru when the latter suddenly asked, 'You are a Christian, are you not? It is written in the Bible that if anyone smites you on one cheek, you must turn the other also. Now, supposing anyone struck you on one cheek, would you be able to turn the other cheek to him?'

'Yes, I would,' replied Toru, and to her great surprise Aru gave her a resounding slap on the cheek. Toru burst out crying, but did not retaliate. Her biographer, Harihar Das, is silent as to whether she turned the other cheek or not. Considering, however, that Toru was always the more forceful character and led Aru in spite of being the younger sister, this childish incident seems to point to the fact that as children, Aru had the stronger character.

The three children studied assiduously from earliest childhood. Babu Shib Chunder Bannerjee, a pious elderly Christian, became their tutor. His niece was the wife of Mr W. C. Bonnerjee who later became the First President of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Babu Shib Chunder was a great favourite of the Dutt children. Toru says in a letter to Miss Martin written in 1877: 'He used to teach us English when we were quite young; ... we, as children, were very fond of him; and older, that affection grew, mixed with esteem. ... He is such a truly

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Christian man, and sympathizes so sincerely with all our joys and sorrows. How we used to try to while away lesson time, by chatting and talking about trifles! But he never allowed us to chat long. We used, I remember, to ask, one after one, about the health of everybody employed in the Financial Department! How interested and anxious we used to get all at once about Mr So-and-so's doings, health, and affairs! We used to read Milton with him latterly, and we read *Paradise Lost*, over and over again, so many times, that we had the first book and part of the second book by heart.'

Soon, Toru and Aru both began to learn to play the piano and to sing under an English teacher, Mrs Sinaes. They further developed these talents in Europe and both excelled as pianists and singers with deep contralto voices. With music, both European and Bengali, a garden house and their ancestral home in Calcutta, their numerous friends and relations and wide reading, the childhood of Toru would indeed have been a happy one but for the sad and early death of Abju in 1865. An interesting description is found in Romesh Chunder's writings about his cousins and their Baugmaree Garden House: 'It was an extensive garden covering many acres of land, and shaded by fruit-trees; and there was a rustic bridge over a canal, which was the delight of our boyhood. We had the run of the whole garden, and Govin Chunder's only son, Abju, showed us his favourite secluded places. Poor boy, he died early, and his loss was an abiding grief to his parents. In the midst of this forest of fruit-trees rose the comfortable and spacious one-storeyed bungalow-house—a perfect picture of repose! There was a good collection of choice books in the house, for study was Govin Chunder's only recreation.'<sup>1</sup>

The shadow of death began to loom early over the Dutts, despite all the comforts and joys of their compact family life. After the death of Abju, Govin Chunder dwelt in perpetual fear of the loss of his other children, and he never allowed them to be separated from him, but cherished every moment of their company. Of Abju's death at the age of fourteen, Govin wrote a sonnet which he often read out to Romesh Chunder in England



when the *Dutt Family Album* was published. In heart-broken lines he cried:

And I am left heart-broken and alone  
With weary mind to count the weary days.

But his faith, which later sustained him and his wife so magnificently, is revealed even in those early days when the elder child was taken:

Love never dies, and there no parting's known:—  
The hour approaches, soon the morn must smile,  
And I shall stand before the awful throne  
With him my loved one, when the ransomed raise  
The never-ending hymn of prayer and praise.

This same faith sustained Toru in her many sorrows and the whole of her writings are imbued with the hope of an eternal and ever happy life beyond the weary days on earth.

Govin himself gives a startling description of his three children in their early childhood:

Most loving is my eldest and I love him most;  
Almost a man in seeming, yet a child;  
And may it long be thus! I would not boast;  
But of his age who taller? less defiled?  
My next, the beauty of our home, is meek;  
Not so deep-loving haply, but less wild  
Than her dear brother;—brow and blushing cheek  
Her nature show serene, and pure, and mild  
As evening's early star. And last of all,  
Puny and elf-like, with dishevelled tresses,  
Self-willed and shy, ne'er heeding that I call,  
Intent to pay her tenderest addresses  
To bird or cat,—but most intelligent,  
This is the family which to me is lent.

Toru and her family spent the time before they sailed for Europe in the winter of 1869 entirely in Calcutta between their two homes in Rambagan and Baugmaree, near Belgachia. Toru especially loved the garden house and she described it in

many of her later poems. She loved above all the majestic trees:

What glorious trees! the sombre saul  
On which the eye delights to rest,  
The betel-nut,—a pillar tall,  
With feathery branches for a crest,  
The light-leaved tamarind spreading wide,  
The pale faint-scented bitter neem,  
The seemul, gorgeous as a bride,  
With flowers that have the ruby's gleam,

The Indian fig's pavilion tent  
In which whole armies might repose,  
With here and there a little rent,  
The sunset's beauty to disclose,  
The bamboo boughs that sway and swing  
'Neath bulbuls as the south wind blows,  
The mangoe-tope, a close dark ring,  
Home of the rooks and clamorous crows,

The champac, bok and South-sea pine,  
The nagessur with pendant flowers  
Like ear-rings,—and the forest vine  
That clinging over all, embowers,  
The sirish famed in Sanscrit song  
Which rural maidens love to wear,  
The peepul giant-like and strong,  
The bramble with its matted hair,

All these, and thousands, thousands more,  
With helmet red, or golden crown,  
Of green tiara, rose before  
The youth in evening's shadows brown.<sup>2</sup>

Only someone who had watched the beautiful trees of India for hours and loved them could have written so accurate a description of them. 'Our Casuarina Tree', Toru's famous poem, again reveals her almost mystic affinity with trees.

Toru's sonnet on 'Baugmaree' is among her best poems and



one can imagine the children with their many cousins and friends playing in those vast grounds:

A sea of foliage girds our garden round,  
 But not a sea of dull unvaried green,  
 Sharp contrasts of all colours here are seen;  
 The light-green graceful tamarinds abound  
 Amid the mangoe clumps of green profound,  
 And palms arise, like pillars grey, between;  
 And o'er the quiet pools the seemuls lean,  
 Red,—red, and startling like a trumpet's sound.  
 But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges  
 Of bamboos to the eastward, when the moon  
 Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus changes  
 Into a cup of silver. One might swoon  
 Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze  
 On a primeval Eden, in amaze.<sup>3</sup>

Baugmarce Garden House attracted so much attention throughout and after Toru's short life that many visitors from abroad wished to visit it. Miss Elizabeth S. Cotton was one such admirer of Toru. In December 1907, thirty years after Toru's death, she visited Calcutta and wrote the following letter to Mr Harihar Das:

My dear Sir,—For years I have regarded Calcutta as a place sacred to the memory of the gifted Toru Dutt, and I have come to see if possible the home where she lived and left to a sorrowing world so few but precious fruits of her great genius.

I would like to see the Garden-House where, as Mr. Edmund Gosse expressed it, she plunged into the mysterious depths of Sanskrit Literature.<sup>4</sup>

Toru's idyllic childhood in the land of her birth was to mature abroad. Govin Chunder was determined to give his children the advantages of foreign travel and education, and Toru and her sister were the first Bengali girls to cross the 'Black Waters'. Their missionary friend, Mrs Barton wrote:

They [the parents] were determined to give their two clever girls the best possible education. They took advantage of our escort to come to Europe that winter (1869), as we were returning home. By my husband's advice, they came with us to Nice, where my parents were then living, and the Dutts spent three or four months there, if I remember aright. We introduced them to several residents at Nice, and they all soon learnt French.<sup>5</sup>

Toru and Aru adored France, and next to their love for India, they were inspired most by France. The French also claimed Toru later as a French woman. Having set foot on French soil at the early age of thirteen, she learnt French with remarkable ease and speed, and throughout her life absorbed and drank deep of French romantic literature and became an ardent lover of France.



## 5. France

THE Dutts landed at Marseilles and went on to Nice where they stayed until the spring of 1870. Here Toru and Aru attended a *Pensionnat* where they assiduously studied French, soon becoming scholars in the language. This was the only school the sisters ever attended, and even this they discontinued in order to concentrate on French more intensely under Govin Chunder's private tutor, Madame Schwayer. Toru and Aru now really began to delve into French literature. The Revolution also fascinated Toru. The love of freedom was rampant in the literature of the day and George Sands' novels of women's emancipation were just what India wanted. Toru's affection for France was such that she even wished to become a French girl. She wrote in her diary that she was an 'indomitable and steadfast French woman'.

At Nice they stayed at the Hotel Helvétique. From here Toru wrote to her cousin Arun Chunder Dutt in Calcutta. 'When the letter arrived we were dining at the "table d'hôte"... the two musicians were playing on a harp and a violin in the room, to give us a *bon appétit*. This is the French way. We went to see the "Carnival" here; that is, the people wear masks and colour themselves, and throw bonbons at people, and are very merry just before Lent, for in Lent they are kept very strict, being Catholics, and they want to be very jolly before Lent.'

They walked to the carnival along slushy roads and their clothes became stained with mud. Then they hired a carriage which proved to be none too comfortable; but they were used to Calcutta hackney coaches and felt 'all the hired coaches here are as good as the best in Calcutta'. The girls went on with a friend, Mr Elliot, Mrs Barton's brother, and a member

of the Punjab I.C.S., to a terrace while their parents remained in the carriage. From there they had to stand on chairs to get a view of the pageant.

Among their friends in France was a doctor's wife who was very fond of them and insisted on their speaking French. She did not want them to speak in English so that they could get as much practice as possible in French. No matter how many their mistakes, Madame, the doctor's wife, always remarked, 'Très bien'.

At the time, France had more to offer than even England. Toru studied French life and must have been impressed by the character of French girls, who, among the more orthodox classes, were brought up very much as the more modern Indian girls were in Bengal, for Toru chose to write about a French girl in her prose novel. The character of Marguerite in *Le Journal de Mlle. D'Arvers* is admirably drawn to suit the French girls she met at Nice, perhaps, and yet the heroine could easily have been Toru herself. That she should have chosen a French theme and heroine goes to prove that she felt at home in French and its domestic life, although the home described in the novel was actually situated in England.

M. James Darmesteter was most impressed by Toru's association with French literature and says: 'One would have liked to have had fuller details of their brief sojourn in France which had a wonderful influence on the ideas and imagination of Toru. French became her favourite language and France the country of her election.'<sup>1</sup>

In Nice, the Dutts walked on the 'promenade des Anglais' and loved the colourful Mediterranean scene. One can imagine how the poetic souls of the girls exulted in the beauty of the Côte d'Azur—the blue sea, the brilliant bougainvillaeas and flowers, the freshly painted villas with red tile roofs, nestling in the slopes of terraced hills, the grape vines, orchards and promenades. Travelling to Cannes and Monaco, as we know they did, must have entranced them, and they drank deep of French life and culture. But even this salubrious climate of the South of France did not suit Aru, more delicate than Toru.



She fell ill, recovered and fell ill again. It was soon evident that the Dutts would have to move away from France. But the few months there had more than left their impression on the girls.

Govin Chunder decided to take his family to England via Paris, although one wonders how he expected Aru to keep better health in a colder and damper climate. They travelled to England with their old friend, Mrs Barton, in the spring of 1870.

Of Toru and Aru, Mrs Barton writes: 'Their knowledge of history and of art was extraordinary, all taught by their father. I remember one day we took them all to Canon Childer's house in Nice, to introduce them there, before we left ourselves. On the table stood a good-sized bronze reproduction of the "Dying Gladiator". Mr Barton (or their father) touched it and looking at the girls said, "Do you know who that is?" Without a moment's hesitation both said, "It must be the 'Dying Gladiator'!" We were astonished, for they could only know it from books and had never been to Rome.' <sup>2</sup>

Paris fascinated Govin Chunder, who resolved to stay in 'the Capital of the world—for Paris is indeed, gainsay it who will, the greatest of all cities in point of beauty, comfort, climate and cleanliness taken all in all.' But their visit could not have been for long, although Harihar Das says: 'After a prolonged stay they left for England', as altogether they stayed about four months in France, and most of the time at Nice.

Finally, they set out for England via Boulogne. An interesting article about the channel crossing from Boulogne to Folkestone is published in the *Bengal Magazine* of February 1874, entitled 'Crossing the British Channel.' Govin Chunder compares their voyage from India to Marseilles in a ship of the P & O 'in which one is so luxuriously served and fed as if he were the great Mogul or Viceroy of Egypt', with their crossing of the channel which they found most uncomfortable. They did not like Boulogne though at first Govin thought it would have been a place worth stopping at as it was quaint and was written of by Thackeray. In reality it proved to be 'a wretched little

maritime town with houses apparently built for sailors only.' On the other hand, the weather being sunny and clear, they decided to cross immediately without wasting time at Boulogne. Nor did they linger at Folkstone but took the train immediately for London.

Though the Dutts' stay in France was only for a few months, Toru's love for the country was not limited to the mere fascination of the language or the beauty of the country. As Mlle Clarisse Bader later remarked: 'She loved our country and showed this love when France was in agony', by her sympathy during the Franco-Prussian war. Toru was but fourteen at the time, but she took an active interest in French politics and seemed averse to Bismarck and his 'Blood and Iron' policy. Though she never mentioned Bismarck by name, she bemoaned France's fate.

When the war commenced, Toru wrote: 'All my heart was with France.' She was so interested in French history that she translated Victor Hugo's speech delivered in the French Legislative Assembly in 1851, and published the translation under the title, 'A Scene from Contemporary History', in the *Bengal Magazine*<sup>3</sup> in which Victor Hugo strongly condemned the proposal to bring about some constitutional changes which would more or less crown Louis Napoleon as the virtual king of France. Victor Hugo was an ardent republican and strongly resented Government under an Emperor. Toru seemed to have strongly supported Victor Hugo's views. Another article appeared in the *Bengal Magazine* with a translation of M. Thier's speech in 1870 opposing the proposal of France declaring war against the Prussian king. That a mere girl should have become so interested in the history of a foreign country shows how much a French girl Toru had herself become.

In her journal dated 29 and 30 January 1871, Toru gives expression to a love for France which was almost identical with that of a French patriot: 'During the few days we remained in Paris, how beautiful it was! What streets! What a magnificent army! But now how fallen it is. It was the first amongst the cities and now what misery it contains!' Toru felt that the down-



fall of France was a retribution by God for her irreligion. 'Oh France, how thou art brought low! Mayest thou, after this humiliation, serve and worship God better than thou hast done in these days—poor, poor France, how my heart bleeds for thee.'

Toru's love for France is further evident in the poem she wrote about the momentous year 1870, at the young age of fifteen, which reveals her maturity of mind:<sup>4</sup>

France  
1870

Not dead,—oh no,—she cannot die!  
Only a swoon, from loss of blood!  
Levite England passes her by,  
Help, Samaritan! None is nigh;  
Who shall stanch me this sanguin flood?

Range the brown hair, it blinds her eyne,  
Dash cold water over her face!  
Drowned in her blood, she makes no sign,  
Give her a draught of generous wine.  
None heed, none hear, to do this grace.

Head of the human column, thus  
Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?  
Thought, Freedom, Truth, quenched ominous,  
Whence then shall Hope arise for us,  
Plunged in the darkness all again?

No, she stirs!—There's a fire in her glance,  
Ware, oh ware of the broken sword!  
What, dare ye for an hour's mischance,  
Gather around her, jeering France,  
Attila's own exultant horde?

Lo, she stands up,—stands up e'en now,  
Strong once more for the battle-fray,  
Gleams bright the star, that from her brow  
Lightens the world. Bow, nations, bow,  
Let her again lead on the way!

## 6. England

IN London the Dutts first stayed at the Charing Cross Hotel. Romesh Chunder Dutt, who was in England at the time for his I.C.S. examination in 1869, says he 'secured rooms for them at the Grosvenor Hotel'. Later, they moved into a furnished house in Brompton (No. 9, Sydney Place, Onslow Square). Here Toru and Aru began to work at their translation of French poetry into English. Romesh Chunder Dutt says: 'It is needless to say that I often visited them there, and spent many pleasant hours with my young cousins. Literary work and religious studies were still the sole occupation of Govin Chunder and his family, and they made the acquaintance of many pious Christians. When the "Dutt Family Album" came out, Govin Chunder presented me with a copy, marked out the poems which were his own, and read, almost with tears in his own eyes, the verses he had written on his deceased son.'<sup>1</sup>

Arun Chunder Dutt, another cousin of Toru's, seemed to have been a particular friend of hers, and she often wrote to him from Europe. He later graduated from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and settled in England. He became a respected doctor and married an English girl.

Aru and Toru were happy in London and came to know many prominent people such as Sir George Macfarren, whose wife taught the girls singing; Sir Bartle Frere, the Governor of Bengal from 1862 to 1867, and many others. Toru remarked that she spent many a pleasant day with the Freres at Wimbledon. Another friend was the Chevalier de Châtelain, a friend of Victor Hugo's and a well-known translator of Shakespeare into French.

Aru, though older, was said to be younger in thought, and was led by her sister who took the initiative in most things,



including her reading. The love and companionship between the two sisters was always perfect. The following conversation is recorded by Harihar Das:<sup>2</sup>

G. C. Dutt. 'I say, Aru, you wanted much to see Lord L. (Lord Lawrence, Viceroy of India, 1864-1867) when in Calcutta. Here is Lord L. as our visitor.' Lord L. 'Did you want to see me—well! and what do you see? (rather pathetically)—an old, broken, weary man. What book is that you have in hand?' Aru. 'One of Miss Mulock's novels, *Lord Halifax*.' Lord L. Ah! You should not read novels too much, you should read histories.' No answer from Aru, Toru answering for her sister. 'We like to read novels.' Lord L. 'Why!' Toru (smiling). 'Because novels are true, and histories are false.'

Commenting on this remark many years later, Mlle Clarisse Bader said in her *Memoire* to a French novel written by Toru: 'Toru Dutt, in replying with such a paradox, proved a true daughter of a poetical Hindu race who prefers legend to history.'

Toru's leadership of Aru was resented neither by Aru nor their father. Later, Aru depended more and more on Toru and people asked who was the older. Aru was the gentler of the two sisters. Toru's memory was unbelievable; she could repeat all her translations by heart. Govin Chunder says that she never slurred over anything but was painstakingly thorough. If any difficulty arose, 'Dictionaries, lexicons and encyclopaedias of all kinds were consulted until it was solved, and a note taken afterwards.' In any dispute over a French, English, and later a Sanskrit word between Toru and her father, the former would almost always prove to be right. If a wager was laid, Toru would invariably win. Govin wrote: 'It was curious and very pleasant for me to watch her when she lost. First a bright smile, then thin fingers patting my grizzled cheek, then perhaps some quotation from Mrs. Barrett Browning, her favourite poetess, like this: "Ah, my gossip, you are older, and more learned, and a man", or some similar pleasantry.'

The Dutt's were very friendly with Sir Edward Ryan, Chief

Justice of the Supreme Court, Calcutta, from 1837 to 1843. He was a friend of Dickens, Thackeray and other famous Victorian writers. In an article in the *Bengal Magazine* of July 1878, Govin Chunder reminisces on one of his visits to Sir Edward. The questions put to the girls by Sir Edward and the quick repartees given by Toru are worth recalling. For instance, he asks, 'Do you know Thackeray's daughters? They are living in your neighbourhood.' No, Toru did not know them (She met Miss Thackeray later at Cambridge). 'Which of Thackeray's works do you like best,' continued Sir Edward. Toru answered promptly: 'Oh, *Esmond*, of course ... *Pendennis* is the most popular novel. But surely *Esmond* is far superior as a work of art.'

On October 7, Toru wrote and told her cousin Arun that she was confined to the house for two weeks due to a sprain. There was no piano in the house in Brompton, so 'Papa is going to hire one'. Toru and Aru were made to study under a Governess, Mrs Lawless. A letter written to Omesh, another cousin, at about the same time gives a gist of the manner in which the girls spent their time in London. For two sick girls, the schedule seems both strenuous and exacting, but later in India, when Toru was much more of an invalid than in London, she worked even more strictly to a timetable. Whether the tasks she allotted herself were her own method of working or were suggested by her father, it is difficult to say, but it was probably Toru herself who set herself her day's tasks. To Omesh she wrote:

I have hardly time to write any letter, as our time is entirely given up to study. First we practise on the piano from seven to half-past seven, when we have our breakfast, then we have our Bible reading. It is generally over by half-past eight. Then we practise again on the piano till half-past nine. After that I read *The Times*, for I take a great interest in the War, and I am sure I know more about it than you do. At ten, Mrs. Lawless comes. She goes away at half-past three. Then we generally read with papa at four, and on Fridays, Mrs. Macfarren comes



to teach singing, and on Mondays we go to have our music lessons from Mr. Pauer. We then practise again on the piano.

The study of French was also in progress. Toru ends her letter to Omesh with the devout words: 'May God guard you from all danger and sin.'

The Dutts employed an Italian servant in their London home, and they spoke to him in French in order to become more fluent in the language. The cook Isabelle soon learnt how to prepare Indian dishes. 'On our table, with mutton cutlets and roly-poly, comes up hot *kuchoorree* or cabbage *Chuchuree* or *Ambole* of eels. Isn't it nice?' Toru mentions snow which fell twice in the winter and of the fun they had playing snow balls. They went occasionally to the theatre, and among the plays they saw were *Amy Robsart* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In 1871, the Dutts went to Cambridge and stayed in Regents Street, overlooking Parker's Piece. Toru and Aru attended 'Higher Lectures for Women' with zeal and application. They also employed a French tutor, M. Boguel. Their greatest attraction in Cambridge was Mary Martin who became Toru's lifelong friend leading to a memorable and almost immortal correspondence between the two girls. It was in fact Miss Martin who helped Harihar Das to compile his biography of Toru many years later. He met Miss Martin in Calcutta in 1913 and mentioned his intention of writing a biography of Toru. She was most interested and helped him by allowing him to publish Toru's letters. *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* carries the following dedication by Harihar Das:

THE MEMOIR  
OF HER BELOVED INDIAN FRIEND  
TORU DUTT  
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO  
MARY E. R. MARTIN  
IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF  
HER TENDER SYMPATHY

Mary E. R. Martin was the only child of Rev. John Martin

of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, and Vicar of St. Mathews the Great from 1859 to 1884. Toru and Aru first met Mary in 1872 when she was fifteen and Toru sixteen. Later, Mary became a missionary and visited Calcutta long after Toru had died, in 1910 and 1913. When Toru met her first at Cambridge, Mary was at school at Malvern Wells.

Another friend the Dutts made at Cambridge was Bishop Clifford of Lucknow. He first met the Dutts at the house of Professor Cowell in Cambridge. The Professor and his wife had become intimate with the Dutts when the former had served on the staff of the Presidency College, Calcutta.

From Cambridge, the Dutts moved to St. Leonards-on-Sea during the last part of their stay in England. Here they continued their study of French privately with M. Girard who, Toru remarked in a letter, 'used to come twice or thrice a week to give papa and me lessons in French. Aru, of course, did not read with us. [Because she was too weak after her recent illness.] He [M. Girard] is very fond of poetry and translated some two or three pieces from the DFA into French verse.' The picture of Toru and Aru which was later sent to Mlle Bader from Calcutta was taken here at St. Leonards. In it, Aru is seated and looks tired and older than her age of nineteen. Toru, on the other hand, is exuberant and seems to be bouncing with life. Her lovely black hair is streaming down her shoulders and her beautiful face expresses her keen and scintillating intelligence. She is seventeen and from the picture it would be difficult to guess that she would die within five years of phthisis. Even her sister looked far from being so much an invalid that she would live scarcely two years longer. Both the girls are dressed in elaborate frilled Victorian frocks, and one wonders why they did not wear the sari or if they ever dressed in Indian costume even when they returned home to Calcutta.

Toru's poem entitled 'Near Hastings' is among her miscellaneous poems published with her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Though not one of her best, it allows us a glimpse of Aru's state of health at the time and how a small act of kindness was appreciated by Toru:



Near Hastings, on the shingle-beach,  
We loitered at the time  
When ripens on the wall the peach,  
The autumn's lovely prime.  
Far off,—the sea and sky seemed blent,  
The day was wholly done,  
The distant town its murmurs sent,  
Strangers,—we were alone.

We wandered slow; sick, weary, faint,  
Then one of us sat down,  
No nature hers, to make complaint;—  
The shadows deepened brown.  
A lady past,—she was not young,  
But oh! her gentle face  
No painter-poet ever sung,  
Or saw such saintlike grace.

She past us,—then she came again,  
Observing at a glance  
That we were strangers; one, in pain,—  
Then asked,—Were we from France?  
We talked awhile,—some roses red  
That seemed as wet with tears,  
She gave my sister, and she said,  
'God bless you both, my dears!'

Sweet were the roses,—sweet and full,  
And large as lotus flowers  
That in our own wide tanks we cull  
To deck our Indian bowers.  
But sweeter was the love that gave  
Those flowers to one unknown,  
I think that He who came to save  
The gift a debt will own.

The lady's name I do not know,  
Her face no more may see,  
But yet, oh yet I love her so!  
Blest, happy, may she be!

Her memory will not depart,  
Though grief my years should shade,  
Still bloom her roses in my heart!  
And they shall never fade!

When in Cambridge, the Dutts and Mary Martin's family met almost daily from December 1872 to April 1873, and many references are made to the Dutts in Mary's mother's diary to walks and intimate teas and long evenings spent by the fireside. When the Dutts went to St Leonards, the two families never met again and Mary says: 'And perhaps our correspondence became the more intimate in consequence.'

Govin Chunder sailed back to India with his family in September 1873 by the P & O liner *Peshawar*.



## 7. Return Home

THOUGH Toru had written many letters to her Indian friends and relations when she was abroad, very few have been preserved. But most of her letters to Mary, written after her return home, have been carefully treasured and published in Mr Harihar Das' biography of Toru. Starting from September 1873, Toru wrote 53 letters in all to Mary, and these invaluable records reveal the real Toru—a young brilliant girl, with an intense thirst for learning and writing. Her simple letters tell us of her home life in Calcutta spent between Rambagan and Baugmaree Garden House. She was, despite her longing to return to Europe, never to leave her native town again.

Her life in Calcutta was exciting and happy enough, with her parents, her pets, her numerous relations and illustrious friends, her books and her writing. It was also tragic, for within a year of their return, Aru succumbed to the ravages of tuberculosis, and could not be saved.

Toru has no reservations with Mary, and pours out the joys and sorrows of her affectionate heart. But the letters are not mere exchanges of confidences between two girls and records of mundane events—they bear a cultured and literary stamp. According to Harihar Das, if Toru's genius 'had been allowed to reach maturity, her letters might have ranked as English classics.'

Despite her descriptions often bordering on the brilliance of almost still-life beauty, enriched with naïve comments and the peculiar humour of Victorian writers, it cannot be denied that the letters are often too jumbled and lack an expression of ordered thought. Toru at times rambles on from one subject to another, which rather detracts from the worth of her correspondence as of literary value. For instance, she may talk in

one paragraph of the death of a pet cat and immediately switch on to discuss the merits of a French poet; or else she will write of her illness and in the next paragraph pronounce her opinion of some social problem of the day. This disjointed manner of writing, however, only goes to express the variety of interests which engrossed Toru's life, and in a manner, because of her childish spontaneity, may even prove her an exceptionally clever letter-writer, for she certainly made her correspondence overflow with interest which keeps the reader's attention throughout.

She was avid for books and more books, for writing and more writing, and has at the same time shown a desire to be a fully-rounded, three dimensional companion to her friend.

Toru's first letters were written from Gibraltar and Alexandria on board the *Peshawar*. They describe the happenings on a voyage. Toru was none too happy, though she kept fairly good health marred only by a little sea-sickness. But Aru was ailing. In fact, Govin Chunder had been forced to return to India because Aru had fallen seriously ill and it was felt by the doctors that she would not be able to survive another winter in England. Toru felt uncomfortable premonitions that she would never see her friend again.

Toru's letters from India commenced from December 1873. The Dutts had landed in Ceylon and spent a pleasant day there, though they had been detained at Galle for four days. Aru had brought out a number of birds with her and many had died, but a few linnets, gold finches and canaries managed to survive.

On arrival in India the Dutts were greeted by their numerous relations. Their pets which they had left behind gave them a warm welcome, and the tiny tots of a few years ago had grown much older and refused to part with their beloved aunts, Toru and Aru, and would not hear of them returning to England.

Though it was December, roses, hibiscus, marigold, asters and other flowers abounded in their beautiful garden. Mamma had brought back many packing-cases full of plants from England, of bulbs, roots and seeds. "The hyacinths are just beginning



to grow. I hope Mamma will succeed in her attempt to introduce English plants in India. Our tanks look very pretty with white water-lilies and blood-red lotus.'

Aru kept guinea pigs which later multiplied so rapidly that Toru was actually able to sell them and 'make a roaring trade', as her father laughingly remarked. Aru was also given geese—'as we have got three or four tanks, it is very convenient for keeping ducks or geese.' Fresh fruits were in ample supply. 'Guavas, which are sometimes like English pears, plantains, oranges of which you can never get the like in England.' Baugmarce Garden House was famous for its mangoes.

Thus the peaceful but full domestic life of the Dutts on their return to India and for the next four years portrayed itself in Toru's letters to Mary.

Their cat Maja died and there was a great sadness in the family as she had been a pet for more than eleven years. She was buried under a *Jhau* tree on the bank of a tank. Mamma and Papa were present at the funeral; but Toru and Aru were too ill to attend the ceremony. The cow had calved and this meant that they would have fresh milk. Aru wanted to milk the cow herself. They had caught a large porcupine in the garden and the roses were lovely. 'There is very little fragrance in English flowers, compared with ours.' They kept poultry. The chickens newly hatched were sent up by Mamma for Toru to see, as she was ill in bed upstairs. They had fresh eggs every morning.

'Aru has not yet tried to catch any fish of size. She says she will wait till she is stronger as she is afraid that the fish when hooked, might, in its attempt to get off, drag her into the water! I abstain from angling for big fish for these same reasons also!'

The monkeys had found a tamarind fruit tree and Maja's kitten was most playful. Toru had not played the piano for some time as she was too ill to go downstairs. She begins to despair of ever being well enough to return to England. 'I do not know if we shall be able to go; this time Papa says we will sell all we have here and go to England and settle there for good. The Lord be with us all wherever we go.'

The domestic life of the Dutts was quiet and regulated. Mamma sang songs and Toru remembered with nostalgia the time when the three children had listened to their mother. Her poem 'Sita'<sup>1</sup> gives an idea of the happy childhood they spent in Calcutta before Abju died:

Three happy children in a darkened room!  
 What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?  
 A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,  
 And in its centre a cleared spot.—There bloom  
 Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace  
 Tall trees; there, in a quiet lucid lake  
 The white swans glide; there, 'whirring from the brake,'  
 The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;  
 There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;  
 There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light,  
 There dwells in peace the poet-anchorite.  
 But who is this fair lady? Not in vain  
 She weeps,—for lo! at every tear she sheds  
 Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,  
 And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.  
 It is an old, old story, and the lay  
 Which has evoked sad Sita from the past  
 Is by a mother sung. . . . 'Tis hushed at last  
 And melts the picture from their sight away,  
 Yet shall they dream of it until the day!  
 When shall those children by their mother's side  
 Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

How vivid must have been the mother's songs sung in Bengali! No wonder Toru wept, always, on hearing the ancient lays chanted every evening.

Reading formed a major programme of each day, and Papa of course encouraged this love for books. All the books in the library at Rambagan had been transferred to the Garden House, where there was much more space and Toru was able to read to her heart's content. 'What with our own library, and the Calcutta Library, of which Papa is a share-holder, I have no lack of books,' wrote Toru. She was a rapid reader



and remarked: 'The reason why I can go through a book so fast is very plain and simple, it is simply owing to our quiet and retired mode of life; the time we would have had to give to dinner, lunch, breakfast, croquet, lawn-tennis, or picnic parties, is wholly given up to reading, and then I was always a book-worm, even when I was quite a child!' She could obtain copies of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* regularly, and Hatchetts of London sent out French and English books and kept her abreast of modern reading. She refers constantly to Mrs Browning, Carlyle, the Bröntes, Byron, Thackeray, Coleridge, Tennyson, George Eliot, Lytton, and other English writers. Her French reading was even wider and more detailed. She rejoiced in Molière's comedies, the *Histoire de la Révolution* by Mignet, the *Papiers Posthumes* by Rossel, *Les Chatiments* and *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, *Voyage aux Pyrénées* by Taine and *Seul* by Saintine, to mention but a few of her favourites. The authors of the French Romantic school and the Parnassians were her constant companions.

At home Toru was much loved by friends and relations. Harihar Das says, 'Fragile blossom she was, a rose-bud half unfurled, filling the little world of her Indian home with fragrance.' Old and young called her sister or *Didi*. Even her grandfather and aunts and uncles! She was tender-hearted and kind and humble to an astonishing degree. She cannot understand why Dr Hunter wished to make her acquaintance and that of her family. 'I am getting quite an important personage.'—she writes. And again, 'Dr. Hunter made much of me and my abilities. Indeed, I felt quite ashamed, for, after all, it is only a book of translations, and Dr. Hunter himself has written a great number of books.'

And thus Toru lived in the midst of her family, rejoicing in the small things which made up her quiet life, and unostentatiously accepting the honours which came to her as a poet. Her wants were simple—a mosquito net for her canary, a look at her horses in the early morning, pleasure in the glorious bloom of a seemul tree, a song from her mother, the feel of her father's hand in her's as she lies at death's door, thus she

lived her little life. Mlle Clarisse Bader writing after her death, gives a picture which lives on through the years.<sup>2</sup> Toru's letters revealed a 'frankness, sensibility, and charming goodness and simplicity which endeared her to me'.



## 8. "She Died in Earliest Womanhood"

THE first few months after the Dutts returned home was spent apparently in collecting the translations of French poems by Aru and Toru and sending them to be published in the 'Poet's Corner' of the *Bengal Magazine*. A continuous output of fresh translations came pouring out from Toru and a few from Aru. The poems started appearing in the *Bengal Magazine* from the early part of 1874. Toru now enters into 'a feverish dream of intellectual effort and imaginative production. When we consider what she achieved in these forty-five months of seclusion, it is impossible to wonder that the frail and hectic body succumbed under so excessive a strain.'<sup>1</sup>

At the turn of the year, quite early in 1874, both Aru and Toru fell ill. Toru began to suffer from the early stages of phthisis before Aru died of the same disease. In March she wrote to Mary after an interval of three months, when she had recovered a little. Her cough was better and she was gaining weight, and by May she was almost well again, because of the dry intense heat of Bengal. Aru, however, was not making the progress which had been expected.

Then all at once Aru died. The heart-broken family could only fall back on their faith, which was so strong that it inspired Toru to exert herself doubly. She now realized she could not escape her sister's fate. She wrote to Mary from Rambagan in September: 'I could not write to you before. The Lord has taken Aru from us. It is a sore trial for us, but His Will be done. We know He doeth all things for our good. She left us on July 23 last, at eleven in the morning. She was very peaceful and happy to the last, though she suffered intensely from fever, dyspepsia and great debility during her last illness. She lies beside my brother in our little cemetery beyond the bridge. We

feel lonely without her who was the life and soul of our small family. She was so cheerful and happy always. Think of us sometimes, dear.'

At the beginning of the year, Toru and Aru were both well set in their work, despite ill health. Aru contributed seven verses to the *Bengal Magazine*, and some of the poems included in the *Sheaf* are by her. The translation of Victor Hugo's 'Morning Serenade' by Aru was first published in April 1874. This poem caught the eye of Edmund Gosse, and he mistakenly allotted it to Toru; but in reality it was one of the few verses Aru had time to write. Gosse quotes it in full in his 'Introductory Memoir' for the *Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* and in his review of the *Sheaf* in the *Examiner*.

Still barred thy doors! the far east glows,  
The morning wind blows fresh and free.  
Should not the hour that wakes the rose  
Awaken also thee?

All look for thee, Love, Light and Song,  
Light in the sky deep red above,  
Song, in the lark of pinions strong,  
And in my heart, true love.

Apart we miss our nature's goal,  
Why strive to cheat our destinies?  
Was not my love made for thy soul?  
Thy beauty for mine eyes?  
No longer sleep,  
Oh, listen now!  
I wait and weep,  
But where art thou?

Here is first rate poetry, and it was no wonder that Gosse, on opening the little book from India and reading these exquisite verses, could hardly believe his eyes. When the volume was handed to him he thought it would be 'hopeless'. Mr Minto, the Editor of the *Examiner*, had thrust it into his unwilling



hands and had cried: 'There, see whether you can't make something of that.' Gosse had gone to the office of the *Examiner* in August 1876, in the very heart of the dead season for books. 'I happened to be in the office of that newspaper', he says, 'and was upbraiding the whole body of publishers for issuing no books worth reviewing. At that moment the postman brought in a thin and sallow packet with a wonderful Indian postmark on it, and certainly a most unattractive orange pamphlet of verse, printed at Bhowanipore, and entitled "A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields, by Toru Dutt."' "

Mr Gosse thought that this 'shabby little book of some two hundred pages, without preface or introduction, seemed specially destined by its particular providence to find its way hastily into the waste paper basket.' He opened the book and found the 'Morning Serenade' and felt: 'When poetry is as good as this it does not matter whether Rouveyre prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore.'

Other poems translated by Aru in the *Bengal Magazine* and included in the *Sheaf* were 'My Village' by Gensoul, 'My Mother's Birthday' and the 'Swallows' by Béranger, the 'Emigration of Pleasure' by Mme Viot and 'Colinette' and 'The Fairy Captive' which make up her seven poems contributed before her death; but none reach the excellence of the 'Morning Serenade.'

Toru also wrote seven poems for the *Bengal Magazine* up to the time of Aru's death and together the sisters published fourteen translations in the *Bengal Magazine*. Among the more well-known of Toru's translations was 'The Leaf' by Arnault which has been much appreciated:

Detached from thy stalk,  
Leaf yellow and dry,  
Where goest thou amain?  
The tempest's fierce shock  
Struck the oak proud and high,  
And I struggled in vain.

Since then the sad day!  
Winds changeful and rude,  
Transport me about,  
Over mountains,—away,  
And o'er valley and wood.  
Hark! The whistle rings out!  
I go where they lead,  
Nor ever complain.  
The rose too must go,  
And the laurel, I know,  
And all things below,  
Then why should I strain,  
Ah me! to remain?



## 9. Alone

LIFE resumed its normal course in Rambagan after Aru's death. It almost seemed as if Govin and his wife and the one remaining daughter were determined to bury their sorrow deep within themselves and live for God alone, and for their scholarship and work. Toru was steadfast to her usual interests. She wrote to Mary about their love for England; her father loved Westmoreland the best of all counties because Wordsworth had stayed by Lake Windermere and Southey in Keswick. Lonely and bereft, Toru now seemed, in spite of her voracious reading, to find time lagging and she wanted to brush up her arithmetic again. Lower Bengal was suffering from a famine at the time and Toru recalled another famine earlier when 'Women, men and children were thin as skeletons, all their bones sticking out. When food used to be given to them, it was painful to see how they fell greedily to it. Mothers would snatch out of their children's hands. They used sometimes to stay in the garden for a few days for the sake of the simple rice and dal they got every morning.'

Bishop Clifford who arrived in Calcutta in 1874 and lived there for four years gives some interesting glimpses of the home life of the Dutts at this time. He was Curate at the old Mission Church where the Dutts worshipped and one of his first tasks was to renew his friendship of Cambridge days with the Dutts whom he had met there. His visit took place four months after Aru's death. 'I saw the family frequently,' he wrote to Harihar Das many years later, 'and always enjoyed my intercourse with them. Mr. Govin Dutt was an extremely cultivated man of ample means, devoting himself to literary and philanthropic pursuits. He was a remarkable linguist, equally familiar with the tongues of the East and the West. I do not think Mrs

Dutt spoke any language but Bengali, but no doubt she understood English to some extent.'

After a few months, the Dutt's again visited Baugmaree Garden house. They had not been able to bear staying at this retreat earlier as every nook and corner reminded them of Aru. She had filled the house with 'her sweet disposition'. The idea of starting to learn Sanskrit now began to haunt Toru. Govin was anxious to help her with the study of India's great classical language. He felt that the bond between Toru and him would grow even stronger if they undertook this new departure in learning together. A deep understanding grew between father and daughter which Toru expresses so aptly in two of her poems, 'A Mon Père', the last poem, an original one and not a translation in the *Sheaf*, and 'The Tree of Life' in the *Ballads*. This poem was reproduced in full as one of ten of Toru's poems quoted in *Literature of India*.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE TREE OF LIFE

Broad daylight, with a sense of weariness!  
 Mine eyes were closed, but I was not asleep,  
 My hand was in my father's, and I felt  
 His presence near me. Thus we often passed  
 In silence, hour by hour. What was the need  
 Of interchanging words when every thought  
 That in our hearts arose, was known to each,  
 And every pulse kept time? Suddenly there shone  
 A strange light, and the scene as sudden changed.  
 I was awake:—It was an open plain  
 Illimitable,—stretching, stretching—oh, so far!  
 And o'er it that strange light,—a glorious light  
 Like that the stars shed over fields of snow  
 In a clear, cloudless, frosty winter night,  
 Only intenser in its brilliance calm.  
 And in the midst of that vast plain, I saw,  
 For I was wide awake,—it was no dream,  
 A tree with spreading branches and with leaves  
 Of divers kinds,—dead silver and live gold,



Shimmering in the radiance that no words may tell!  
Beside the tree an Angel stood; he plucked  
A few small sprays, and bound them round my head.  
Oh, the delicious touch of those strange leaves!  
No longer throbbed my brows, no more I felt  
The fever in my limbs.—‘And oh,’ I cried,  
‘Bind too my father’s forehead with these leaves.’  
One leaf the Angel took and therewith touched  
His forehead, and then gently whispered ‘Nay!’  
Never, oh never had I seen a face  
More beautiful than that Angel’s, or more full  
Of holy pity and of love divine.  
Wondering I looked awhile,—then, all at once  
Opened my tear-dimmed eyes—When lo! the light  
Was gone—the light as of the stars when snow  
Lies deep upon the ground. No more, no more,  
Was seen the Angel’s face. I only found  
My father watching patient by my bed,  
And holding in his own, close-prest, my hand.

This poem, verging on the mystic, is in my mind the best of Toru’s verse and the vision she sees is like Blake’s peep into the world of Divine Love. That she should in her supreme moment of happiness plead for her father also to be blessed shows how much she brooded on the fact that she would be taken from him and he would be left alone sorrowing, for his was not to be that divine vision—not yet.

There is every evidence on reading Toru’s verses and even her French novel that she often passed into an other-worldly state. As she grew frailer and more serene, especially after the great sorrow of losing her sister, and as she surrendered herself more and more to God’s will, she realized more deeply her unity with God. Thus, her *Ballads* are far stronger and more powerful in her spontaneous outbursts of song, when she came into close touch with a mystic contact with the Unknown. Again and again we find this cohesion between the human and divine, and with this unearthly strength, her poems became far more smooth-flowing and mature. In her *Ballads*, she delves deep into the understanding of Hindu links between the sons and

daughters of the world and the gods. Savitri follows Yama, the god of death, and claims her husband's soul back; she is not afraid of the awful presence of the Lord of the Dead but cries:

The power of goodness is so great  
We pray to feel its influence  
For ever on us.

Even death is goodness and there is no fear. 'No weariness, O Death, I feel.' Thus also the Royal Ascetic 'Endeavoured to attain Perfect dominion on his soul'. In fact Toru's *Ballads* are abounding with mystic sentiments. Death brings no sense of martyrdom, only a 'rebirth in the realm of the Light of Life which, as St John says, 'Shines in the darkness. It came unto its own and as many as received it became in authority as Sons of God.'

Many poems of Toru were published in the *Bengal Magazine*, for after Aru's death Toru continued to appear in the 'Poet's Corner' under the initials T.D. Two or three epigrams were translated at this time, which, because they lack crisp humour and terseness, are not of Toru's best form of writing. She was too romantic a writer ever to shine at epigrams, even if they were mere translations.

Toru seemed particularly interested in Leconte de Lisle, and at the end of 1874 published an essay on him in the *Bengal Magazine*, with translations of some of his poems. Toru had a particular affinity with this French poet. His poem 'La Morte de Valmiki' naturally attracted an Indian. Edmund Gosse says: 'This study, which was illustrated by translations into English verse, was followed by another on Joséphin Soulayr, in whom she saw more than her maturer judgment might have justified. There is something very interesting and now, alas! still more pathetic in these sturdy and workmanlike essays in unaided criticism. Still more solitary her work became, in July, 1874, when her sister, Aru, died, at the age of twenty.'<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to Mary Martin on December 15, 1874, Toru remarks: 'Papa says he will publish our translations from the



French poets as soon as there are two hundred pieces. At present I send them to the *Bengal Magazine* edited by Mr Dey<sup>3</sup>, a native minister. Papa hopes to publish them in collected form as soon as the required number is ready.' In the same number of the *Bengal Magazine*, Toru published her essay on Henry Louis Vivian Derozio.

The *Bengal Magazine* comes in for criticism from Toru in a letter written in early 1875 to Mary Martin: 'Would you believe it: The December number of the Magazine has not come out yet.' Printers were slow in Calcutta!

By the end of 1874 Toru was again very ill. She was confined to her bed and was spitting blood and had frequent bouts of fever. And yet she hoped to go abroad, and the doctor said this may be possible by the spring of the next year.

## 10. The Year 1875

TORU wrote and wished her friend Mary a happy New Year on January 1, but in February she again fell ill. By the spring no preparations could be made to go abroad. The idea had to be abandoned that year due to Toru's continued bad health. She was steeped in the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning at the time, for Mamma had given her a book of her poems. She was also reading *Bleak House* and contributing her French translations to the *Bengal Magazine*. A new batch of books had arrived from England.

The Prince of Wales' [Edward VII] visit was due in November that year. Toru, while looking forward to it, comments on the many reactions towards it. In July her grandmother died, but Toru could not even attend the funeral because she was too ill and a plaster [blister as it was then called] had been put on her chest. This painful remedy seemed to have been considered the standard treatment for chest troubles.

By September, Calcutta was wildly excited at the approaching visit of the Prince. Govin Chunder was asked to join a reception committee. Apart from this coming event, life seemed to have been quiet, as usual. Toru tabulates her time-table for an average day: 'We live a very quiet life here and I have very little news to give you. I get up at half past four, prepare two cups of chocolate, one for myself and one for Papa. Then I go to dress, and by the time I come out of the dressing room Papa and Mamma get up and I find the former smoking his morning cigar. Then I go to the roof of the house; it is very cool early in the morning, up there. After that I give Baguette and Pinoo their morning pittance of fried fish. I come down and instal myself in the window of this room below which Gentille and Jeunette take their feed of gram and bran and a delicious *suttoo* (flour



of oats) which is given to horses in India, to keep them cool during the very hot months.'

After the feeding of the horses followed breakfast and Mamma's household chores. 'I either take up a book or play for a quarter of an hour with the kittens, and Papa reads or writes or pores over the *Indian Daily News*. At 12, we have our lunch, after which I read or write till three, when I either take a custard apple, or a slice of Batavian orange. At five, we dress and go out, I generally for a drive and Papa and Mamma to my Uncle's garden. At seven we have our dinner, and at 8.30 p.m. a cup of tea and at ten to bed.'

Of her translations, the 'History of a Soul' by Eugene Manual again reveals Toru's interest in the mysterious workings of God and contact between the finite and infinite worlds:

In secret from among the throng  
 God sometimes takes a soul,  
 And leads her slow, through grief and wrong  
 Unswerving to her goal.  
 And when he sees her over there  
 Like needle to a pole,  
 Upon his work he smiles anew—  
 Thus forges God a soul.

There was to be a grand fireworks display on the Calcutta Maidan in honour of the Prince. 'When the Duke of Edinburgh came here in 1869,' says Toru, 'I think they spent £9,000 on fireworks. Was it not literally converting money into smoke?' Papa was to take Toru to the races and she remarks, 'I should love to go very much.'

By now Toru had completed her *Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*<sup>1</sup>. The concluding sonnet was not a translation but an original verse and a very beautiful one. It has been considered 'quite perfect' by some critics:

#### *A Mon Père*

The flowers look loveliest in their native soil  
 Amid their kindred branches; plucked, they fade

And lose the colours nature on them laid,  
 Though bound in garlands with assiduous toil.  
 Pleasant it was, afar from all turmoil  
 To wander through the valley now in shade  
 And now in sunshine, where those blossoms made  
 A paradise, and gather in my spoil.  
 But better than myself no man can know  
 How tarnished have become their tender hues  
 E'en in the gathering, and how dim their glow!  
 Wouldst thou again new life in them infuse,  
 Thou who has seen them where they brightly blow?  
 Ask memory; she shall help my stammering Muse.

Now that the book was completed, Toru had nothing much to do and started her long cherished wish to learn Sanskrit. 'So Papa and I are going to take up Sanskrit.' She began her studies on December 4. Toru longed to read the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in the original.

In the meanwhile the usual routine with a few outside contacts continued. One of their friends from England, Miss Ada Smith, had come to Calcutta, and the Dutts had taken her to Baugmaree Garden House. An aunt showed the foreign visitor her 'casket of gems'. Miss Smith was charmed with the garden and house and wondered why Toru and her family longed to return to Europe when they had 'an earthly paradise to live in and enjoy.'

Great preparations were now in progress for the visit of the Prince. By December the Rajas and Maharajas were arriving in Calcutta. The Fort and Barracks were freshly painted and great arches were built. All this though the Prince would only stay one week. A Raja had ordered a garment of pearls and precious stones for himself. It cost him fifteen lakhs. Another thirty lakhs would be spent when the Prince would stay in his dominions.

At this time, Govin Chunder showed Toru's French translations to a publisher, but Calcutta publishers were very timid. The publisher referred Govin to another publisher. Thus ended another year without the hope of publishing her first book.



Toru, now set her mind whole-heartedly to her new task of learning Sanskrit, and, with her genius for mastering languages, was in a short time able to read it quite fluently. But ten months was all she was allowed. Her health now began to deteriorate so quickly that she had to abandon her new hobby under her doctor's orders by September of the next year. Toru confessed to her friend that Sanskrit was very difficult, but looked forward to mastering it all the same, though she realized that it was difficult to learn it perfectly in less than six or seven years. When she started Sanskrit, she wrote that her pundit was very pleased with her eagerness to learn, and hoped great things from her assiduity. Given time, there is no knowing how great a Sanskrit scholar Toru might not have become. By July 1876 she writes: 'I think I shall give up Sanskrit.' She found the grammar very difficult, she had finished the three parts of *Riju-Pat* and was going to begin reading *Sakuntala* by Kalidasa; but all too soon her studies were cut short.

## II. At Twenty

The Prince had come and gone and Calcutta reposed smug and satiated after the visit. 'The Prince left on Monday last,' says Toru, writing on January 13, 1876. 'I had a good view of his pleasant and rather handsome face and his merry blue eyes.' He was fair but a little bald. Toru saw him again with her father at an entertainment in Belgachia and in a rather scathing manner she relates the extravagances of the people of India. The Maharaja of Kashmir wore a *pugree* worth at least forty lakhs. Presents were given by him: 101 Kashmir shawls, a hukkah of gold set with diamonds and other gems, a gold tea and dinner service and many other fabulous things.

Babu Jagadananda Mukherjea caused much excitement when he invited the Prince to his house and introduced him to some of the women of the family. In Bengali society most of the women were in *purdah* at the time and Toru comments that Babu Jagadananda broke a Hindu convention. Bengalis felt that an insult and an outrage on Hindu society had been perpetrated. The Prince had not visited any house in a personal capacity. He only went to Jagadananda's home because the latter promised the Prince that he would introduce his ladies to him. One of the journals complained that this was an unpardonable action. Later a play was staged based on this incident and Lord Northbrook passed a law that any drama which could create hatred against British rule must stop. Toru then tells a story with her quiet humour that the Prince saw a prismatic compass and asked a boy what it was. The boy answered: 'A royal com-com-pass, you prismatic Highness!'

At last Toru's book was to be published and she was busy correcting the proofs. The printer's devils amused her. For



'honour's throne' they had printed 'horror's throne'. By February the *Sheaf* was nearly ready.

Toru was now interested in a French Book entitled *La Femme dans L'Inde Antique*. She was so fascinated by this rendering of the lives of Indian heroines by a French woman that she asked the author, Mlle Clarisse Bader's permission to translate it. Thereafter followed a friendship which has become a part of Toru's life and memory. Her praise of Indian women is voiced in a letter to Mlle Clarisse Bader: 'You will see how grand, how sublime, how pathetic, our legends are. The wifely devotion that an Indian wife pays her husband, her submission to him even when he is capricious or exacting, her worship of him as her "god and her life" as old Spencer has it.'

March 4 was Toru's birthday, and though only twenty she wrote to Mary: 'I am getting old, *n'est ce pas?*' Later she commented on a Parsee girl's curiosity as to whether Toru had children and Toru's answer that she was not married! 'Marriage, as you know, is a great thing with Hindus. An unmarried girl of fifteen is never heard of in our country.' In Indian families one was almost a grandmother at twenty-four. 'Papa is getting old and so am I. I feel so old sometimes.'

Mlle Bader's book arrived from France on her birthday and the *Sheaf* was out on March 24. A copy was sent to Mary with the remark: 'I wonder what the papers will say of my book. Of course they will be *for* and *against*, and I have already armed myself with stoicism.'

Toru's criticism of her own community was quite severe at times. She wishes that her grandmother had become a Christian. But 'she is so much better than many who profess to be Christians'. Her assessment of Calcutta and the Indian Christians are interesting. 'Calcutta is a sink of iniquity.' Not only among the Hindus (among whom were many worthy people) but even among the Bengali Christians, the morals were so low! 'And the saddest thing is, that Hindus have a very bad idea of Christianity and only think it a cloak which some people take to commit under its cover a multitude of sins. But let me stop here; the manners of Bengali Christian Society (with a very

few exceptions) are such as would sadden the merriest heart and dishearten the most hopeful.'

Toru followed the papers assiduously and relates some interesting police reports to Mary. After a soldier had shot a peacock and was attacked by the villagers, there was a case against the former but he was acquitted for the 'life of one British soldier in the eyes of the British Government' was precious.

Some soldiers had killed nine Bengalis and seven had been wounded, and other injustices were pointed out. Bitter feelings against the British were now beginning to stir Toru's young British-trained mind. There was the case of a boy who had been given three weeks' hard labour for having defended himself against some dogs which had attacked him. The dog belonged to an Englishman. 'The papers are speaking against this crying scandalous shame; the magistrate and the sessions judge ought to be dismissed for so monstrous a perversion of the law. Imagine the row that would have been made in England at a Magistrate sending a boy to a treadmill under such circumstances.' Again, Lord Lytton had been too lenient in punishing an Englishman who had killed his syce. 'You see how cheap the life of an Indian is in the eyes of an English judge.' Lord Lytton had even objected to blows being given to the British culprit. But Toru, nevertheless, respected Lord Lytton and she dedicated her French novel to him.

In many of Toru's letters, she used the word 'native' for Indian. That she meant nothing derogatory to her countrymen and women by this misused word was evident. It was the custom for Indians, especially among Christians, to use the word 'native', possibly to distinguish the community from the British Christians and Anglo-Indians. However, Toru's use of the word was not a happy one. Bengalis felt that it meant a reference to coloured races as against white and was largely used by the British, who even sometimes referred to Indians in the old days as 'niggers'. Miss Martin seemed to have pointed out to her this use of the word 'natives' and the latter thanked her friend for correcting her. She would be careful of using the word in future.



Toru continued to take a lively interest in the behaviour of the British towards Bengalis. At a public meeting held for the Prince, an Englishman had uncivilly pushed away a Bengali from the dais, and the Prince had at once sent his A.D.C. to stop the Englishman from behaving so rudely.

Toru was interested, but not to a very great extent, in the position and status of Indian women. It is obvious that her short life, so absorbed in writing and scholarship, could spare little time for social reform and work. Ananda Mohan Bose, a brilliant Bengali of the times, whom she had met often at Cambridge, went to see her one day in Calcutta, when the Dutts still had hopes of revisiting Europe. Toru writes: 'He [Mr Bose] wanted me to visit his school for adult girls. The girls are not generally of orthodox Hindu parents, but rather of Brahmo's or followers of Keshub Chunder Sen's religion. He was sorry to hear that *probably* we should be going to Europe, for he thought I would be of great help and use in the education of my countrywomen.'

Toru herself was protected from the orthodox world's rigid rules in the freedom which her community enjoyed, and it is possible she gave little thought to the problems which beset women, except to complain that in Europe she could be much freer. She could not mix much with Bengali society because the existing *Sabhas* were only for men, and women in general were kept in the seclusion of their homes.

Her last days were approaching, and Toru was not allowed to sing any more. 'Papa is so careful,' she wrote, 'I tell him he should keep me under a glass case, for I am not half so delicate as he makes me out to be, or as he is afraid that I am.' Papa had bought her Victor Hugo's books and Toru was translating more French poems, as the *Sheaf* was in great demand, and she hoped for a second edition. Some of her verses had been accepted by the *Calcutta Review* and Papa was very pleased and 'So am I, for the *Calcutta Review* is the best of its kind in India.'

The *Bengal Magazine* asked Toru to send more contributions and Toru sent translations of Souvary, Sainte Beuve, Comte de Gramont, Auguste Vacquerie, Théophile Gautier, Voltaire,

Marnier, Hugo and others. Govin Chunder, in an article to the *Bengal Magazine*, remarked that the only English translations of Souvary's works were to be found in the *Sheaf*.

By December of 1876 Toru was really ill. As her own doctor was away, Dr Smith from the Medical College came to attend on her. Her spitting of blood was not stemmed by medicines. Even digitalis was not acting any more. She was given an intravenous injection. 'When Dr. Smith first came to see me,' she wrote to Mary, 'he wore a very professional air, and only asked professional questions. Suddenly his eyes fell on the table, where the *Sheaf* lay in all its orange-coloured glory; a light dawned upon the doctor. "Are you the author of this book?" said he. You should have seen his redoubled interest in my health! "This *poitrinaire* is then the author of this book!" He was surprised, interested, and pleased. So you can see the *Sheaf* has at least done something!'



## 12. The End

ONE OF the most beautiful episodes of Toru's life was her deep friendship with Mlle Clarisse Bader. In reply to Toru's letter of February 2, 1877, asking the French author's permission to translate her book *La Femme dans L'Inde Antique*, and enclosing a copy of the *Sheaf* to her, Clarisse wrote back: 'Is it really a descendant of my dear Indian heroines who wishes to translate the work dedicated to the ancient Aryans of the Gangetic Peninsula?' Of course permission for translation was immediately granted. Clarisse had written four volumes of the history of women—Indian, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman and of all the heroines she found that except for the women of the Bible, the 'greatest purity and devotion' was found among the women of ancient India.

Toru wrote back that she was proud to be able to say that the heroines of 'our great epics are worthy of all honour and love. Can there be a more touching and lovable heroine than Sita? I do not think so.' Toru's wish to see Clarisse never materialised, for on April 13, 1877, she informed her French friend that she was indeed very ill. 'A letter from you with your portrait will do me good. All our plans are changed. We shall not be able to go to Europe in April. "Man proposes and God disposes?"' Greatly concerned with this news, Clarisse replied the next month that she was indeed disappointed at not seeing Toru whose works and letters reveal 'a refined and charming soul'. Toru could write no more except a few lines on July 30, a month before she died; but not knowing that the end had come so quickly, Clarisse wrote in September that she had missed the mail and her letter had been delayed. 'What! Can your illness have lessened in any degree the virility of the nature you reveal in your portrait? Are those beautiful eyes,

full of fire, languishing? Ah! but that can just be a passing phase.'

It came as a great shock to Clarisse when she received a letter from Govin Chunder, dated September 30, to say that his daughter had passed away on August 30. To Clarisse, who loved Toru without ever having set eyes on her, the Bengali poetess was a shining example of an Indian Christian who had taken the best of Indian culture and mingled it with European learning to present a beautiful picture to the world.

In the last year of her life, many renowned friends came to pay their homage to Toru, including Sir William Hunter and Ananda Mohan Bose, and her reading was becoming more and more absorbing for she was perusing Sainte Beuve and Victor Hugo, and Hatchets had sent a new consignment of books. But Toru was now too ill and in June she wrote to Mary that three blisters had been placed under her right collar bone all within a fortnight and that they were very painful. 'I feel quite mad with the pain. One has hardly healed up yet.' The next month she wrote: 'May God help us to bear our Crosses patiently', and she quoted Newman's hymn: 'I would not miss one sigh or tear.' This was the 53rd and last letter received by Mary after the return of Toru to India in 1873.

Imagine then the two old parents, bereft of their three beloved children, awaiting death themselves, and living only in the memory of the lost voices. Every tree and flower, the numerous servants, the beloved horses and cats, so lovingly tended by Aru and Toru were all still there; but where were the daughters, so beautiful, so talented? Where was Toru's laughter and song, her learning and innocence? But she with Abju and Aru would once again be reunited to their father and mother, never to be parted, as the Christian faith promised. Sustained with this belief the old father, though with shaking hand, found strength to trace out the hidden manuscripts of his daughter. Only in the memory and service of his children, and especially of Toru, could Govin Chunder survive the few years he managed to live after the passing of Toru.

Toru died with books strewn all around her. Govin, writing



of her death to Mary, said that Toru had read all her letters up to July and that they had been a source of great comfort to her. The end came on August 30, at Rambagan. Toru was twenty-one years and four months. She passed away 'firmly relying on her Saviour Jesus Christ, and in perfect peace.' Govin Chunder wrote to Mary the day after his daughter died: 'Toru has passed from this earth. She left us last night at 8 p.m. and her end was perfect peace.' She was buried in the C.M.S. Cemetery in Upper Circular Road. The inscription runs as follow:

TORU DUTT  
YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF  
GOVIN CHUNDER DUTT,  
BORN 4 MARCH, 1856,  
DIED 30TH AUGUST, 1877.

BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH AND I  
WILL GIVE THEE A CROWN OF LIFE.

Rev. ii. 10.

To this day the sad grave of Toru Dutt and her brother and sister give evidence of young lives snatched away before their time; with the poignant thought of what might have been. Govin Chunder, writing to Clarisse, said: 'She has left us for the land where parting and sorrow are unknown. Her faith in her Redeemer was unbounded, and her spirit enjoyed perfect peace—the peace beyond all understanding .. There has never been a sweeter child, and she was my last one. My wife and I are left alone in our old age, in a house empty and desolate, where once were heard the voices of our three beloved children. But we are not forsaken; the consoler is with us, and a time will come when we shall meet in the presence of our Lord, not to part again.'

### 13. A Sheaf

*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Field* was dedicated to Madame Govin C. Dutt with a quotation from Schiller:

I bring some flowers and fruits,  
Gathered in another soil,  
In another sunlight,  
In a happier clime <sup>1</sup>

Though the first edition of March 1876 had neither a Preface nor an Introduction, it was by no means an insignificant book. The Indian edition was a large octavo volume of 252 pages of which 40 consisted of notes showing Toru's vast insight into French literature. Eight of the 165 poems were by Aru, and the rest by Toru. The translations were from about seventy Parnassian poets, including Du Bellay, Du Bartas, Scarron, Mme Viot, Pierre Corneille, De Parny, Le Compte de Gramont, De Florian, De Vigny, Chénier, Musset, Béranger, Sainte Beuve, Brizeux, Dupont, V. de Laparde, Mme Ackermann, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle, Mme Desbordes-Valmore and many others.

The first edition was rapidly sold out and Toru soon commenced preparations for a second, though she did not live to see it published. The first edition was in a pale blue cover with gold letters, and if it seemed to Gosse, who saw it in the office of the *Examiner* in 1876, 'a most unattractive orange pamphlet of verse', it was because as Toru explained in her letter to Mary, it was only a paperback. These cheaper and lighter editions were sent out to Europe as they could be more easily packed and posted. The fact that such an insignificant pamphlet should have received the attention it did was startling and could only



have been due to the worth of the poems themselves. Among the most prominent reviewers from abroad were André Theuriet in France and Edmund Gosse in England.

A second or 'New Edition' was published by the same publishers who had issued the first edition—the Saptahik Sambad Press of Bhowanipore, in 1878 with a memoir by the heart-broken father, Govin Chunder Dutt, which he wrote in October 1877 from his Baugmaree Garden House.

In this preface he bemoans the fact that despite the best medical care, he could not save Toru. This new edition contained thirty fresh translations and thus took the total number of poems to almost 200. The poems were regrouped and the book contained a frontispiece of the two sisters. A third edition was published by Messrs Kegan Paul in London in 1880. Two of the translations were also published in an anthology by Sir Roper Lethbridge in the *Indian Magazine and Review*. He also wrote an article on 'The poetry of Toru Dutt'.

When the *Sheaf* was first published, Toru anxiously awaited the reviews. Among the first was a notice in the *Bengal Magazine* of May 1876: 'The readers of the *Bengal Magazine* must have read with intense pleasure those pieces of exquisite poetry, chiefly translations from modern French poets, which appeared in its pages month after month during the last two years, under the signature T.D. These pages with additions have been collected and just published separately in a large octavo Vol. 234 pages long; and T.D. of the *Bengal Magazine* becomes developed into Miss Toru Dutt the accomplished daughter of Baboo Govind Chunder Dutt, the Editor of the *Dutt Family Album*. She is a member of perhaps the most talented family of Bengal, the Dutt family of Rambagan, Calcutta, most members of which have distinguished themselves by their talents. The founder of the family, the late Baboo Rasamaya Dutt, was a man of extraordinary talents as he rose from nothing to the then distinguished position of Commissioner of the Court of Requests. Two of his sons were cut off in the prime of manhood. Three sons are living, Govind, Hara, and Girish. Miss Toru Dutt had an elder sister Miss Aru Dutt who died two years



ago; she was as accomplished as the authoress of these poems, and did us the honour to send us occasionally her poetical effusions for publication in this Magazine under A.D. Miss Dutt is a Christian.'

Other reviews were quick to follow. The *Englishman* pointed out some mistakes in versifying, but on the whole gave a good report. It thought the last piece in the book, 'A mon père', a sonnet, 'faultless'. The *Madras Standard* had taken Toru for a man. Toru was amused and a little flattered. The paper generally felt that Toru possessed a rare ability and showed promise of great achievements. The *Friend of India* commented that 'this Bengalee lady has given us a real good book of translations from French poets in highly creditable English verse.' The *Indian Charivari* felt that they would not have dreamt that 'it was the production of a native of this country. The versions are most graceful, and show a knowledge both of English and French.' Most Indian papers praised the book.

Later in the year, the *Examiner* published a two-column notice by Edmund Gosse, who was greatly surprised to see the poems translated by an 'Indian girl' into the measure of the original. 'This amazing feat she performed with truly brilliant success.' Toru possessed the rare virtue of absolute and unaffected exactness. 'An English translator will always try to smooth over an elegance, rather than give us a true but awkward equivalent of the original.' Toru even at the expense of losing her poetic value 'made a true translation'. Toru was very pleased with the review and said that it was 'very gracious and frank and a little funny too. It is the best notice that has been written on the *Sheaf*, and I thank the reviewer, whoever he may be, most heartily.' It is sad that Toru never got to know Edmund Gosse personally or even corresponded with him. Sarojini Naidu was fortunate enough to meet him twenty years later. Gosse's personal advice and help would have greatly enriched Toru's writing and smoothed down the jagged edges of her poetry.

The *Courier de L'Europe* contained a small notice by Châtelain and André Theuriet's review in the *Revue des deux Mondes* did not appear till the next year.



An interesting review by the critic E. H. Thomas was published in the *London Quarterly Review* and quoted in full as a 'Supplementary Review' in the *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. Mr Thomas felt that the notes were in themselves an astounding evidence of the vast knowledge of French literature, and the poems a remarkable feat. There was a great deal of individual and beautiful work. Dr Brajendranath Seal speaking to the reviewer felt that he was also most impressed by the notes, and if not for the verses, the notes alone deserved republication. 'It seems impossible that an Indian girl, at such an age, should have had such a knowledge of French literature. And in the *Notes*, while never merely foolish even when boldest, she deals with French masters as one assessing the work of equals, and it seems hard to tell which to admire more—the range of reading, or the independence and masculinity of criticism. These Indian girls—though the gentle Aru, one knows, had far the smaller share in these surprising *Notes*—knew their own minds with a precision and a strength that compels respectful attention.'<sup>2</sup> He felt that Aru wrote some of the best poems in the *Sheaf*.

Edmund Gosse remarks that the notes are curious and bewildering. 'Nothing could be more naïve than the writer's ignorance at some points, or more startling than her learning at others. On the whole, the attainment of the book was simply astounding.'<sup>3</sup> Toru was engrossed mostly with the moderns and the classic poets did not interest her much. They may not have even existed, pointed out Gosse, as far as Toru was concerned. 'For her André Chénier was the next in chronological order after Du Bartas. Occasionally she showed a profundity of research that would have done no discredit to Mr Saintsbury or "le doux Asselineau". She was ready to pronounce an opinion on Napoléon le Pyrénéen to detect a plagiarism in Baudelaire. But she thought that Alexander Smith was still alive, and she was curiously vague about the career of Sainte Beuve.'<sup>4</sup>

The first poem in the *Sheaf* was by Leconte de Lisle, on whom Toru had previously written an article in the *Bengal Magazine*. Toru in her own small way, possessed with Leconte de Lisle, a great deal in common in their longing for the sublime and reali-

ization of the infinite. There is the same surrender and even rejoicing in death. Addressing the Sun, the French poet wrote:

And let thy glory like a bloodstain pure  
Flow from thy wounds, but in thy death rejoice!  
Thou shalt rise again. Thy hope is sure.

Toru's surrender to death was her faith in a rebirth, as it was of a number of Victorian writers. Charlotte Brönte is for ever harping on the need to resign oneself to God's will. A sweet and almost melodramatic resignation always accompanied the far too frequent tragic incidents that took place, both in the reality and fiction of that strait-laced age.

Translating the *Compte de Gramont*, Toru felt that he was among the best of modern French poets and that he had also written many poems in Italian. Unpublished translations of some select sonnets by this poet were found among Toru's Mss. after her death.

Of Victor Hugo, one of Toru's favourites, she commented that perhaps he was the greatest of 'living' poets. In a letter to Mary, Toru says: 'Sometimes Victor Hugo gets rather difficult. . . Without Littré's Dictionary, it would be hard to understand all the technical terms; but his French is so good.'

Toru's note on Soulayr says that he was good at elaborating scenes with great care. Each part was a pastoral picture or a little drama of exquisite beauty. Soulayr 'has been called, and deservedly, the Petrarch of France.'

Little intimate pictures of the poets from whom Toru translated are given throughout her notes. How she was able to know small details such as that Béranger's 'Vocation' was a great favourite of Thackeray's, are quite astonishing. Charles Nodier's strength lay 'in prose more than in poetry. His stories are charming and remind one very much of Washington Irving. A very graphic account of his life and works has been given by Alexander Dumas who was a personal friend of his. Nodier travelled in England and Scotland, and some verses addressed by him



to Sir Walter Scott after a visit, will be found in one of the earlier numbers of Blackwoods Magazine'.

André Lemoyne had not written much, though what little he had published was worthy of high praise. Pierre Dupont was the 'poet of sorrows and joys of the poor.' Nicholas Martin was imbued with the grand poetry of Germany. He was born in Bonn and his mother was a German and the sister of Karl Simrock, the translator into modern language of the old and magnificent *Nibelungen* which Victor Hugo considered one of the three great epics of the world. Toru proudly adds that the other two were the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

One of Toru's most beautiful translations, perhaps it also expressed her own sorrow at losing her sister, is a poem by de Parny entitled 'Death of a Young Girl':

Though childhood's ways were past and gone,  
More innocent no child could be,  
Though grace in every feature shone,  
Her maiden heart was fancy free.

A few more months, or happy days,  
And Love would blossom,—so we thought,  
As lifts in April's genial rays  
The rose its clusters richly wrought.

But God has destined otherwise,  
And so, she gently fell asleep,  
A creature of the starry skies,  
Too lovely for the earth to keep.

She died in earliest womanhood;  
Thus dies, and leaves behind no trace,  
A bird's song in a leafy wood,—  
Thus melts a sweet smile from the face.

Toru writes about Lamartine: 'Read his life by himself and his travels, dear reader, if you have not done so, and thank us for the recommendation. In fancy, in imagination, in

brilliance, in grandeur, in style,—in 'all that makes a poet — *excepting* purity,—he must yield to Victor Hugo.' Then comes Toru's criticism: 'There is much in Victor Hugo,—far greater poet though he be,—which it would not be wise to put into the hands of young people whose principles have not been sufficiently formed,—but Lamartine may be placed indiscriminately in the hands of all.' Toru was nothing if not Victorian in her assessment of good reading! A Puritan trait in her criticisms and her own writing almost evinces traces of an unfortunate inhibition, and yet, just as one would judge Jane Austen or Charlotte Brönte, one must appreciate Toru for this 'proper' approach—for Toru would not have been ever at her best in any other mode of poetry or prose. And so, one can almost forgive her orthodox moral evaluation when she says: that there are in *Les Miserables* 'some wicked parts. . . as there are in almost all French books.'

Sainte Beuve, says Toru, though 'one of the greatest literary authorities and critics in France,' was not of the first order of poets. 'It must not be supposed that M Sainte-Beuve is bad or even a mediocre poet. Though he does not belong to the first class, and has no title to be ranked with the Hugos and the Lamartines, he takes a high place in the second.'

And thus Toru writes forty pages of *Notes*, which are so refreshingly frank, naïve and critical, that one can scarcely relinquish the volume until one has reached the last page. Alfred de Musset 'possesses the spirit, the power, the brilliance, and the love of nature sometimes real and sometimes affected.' Like Byron he was at times eccentric and wild. Jules Lefèvre-Deumier was 'one of the most fertile and the most persevering of the French poets of the nineteenth century. He was the brother-at-arms and friend of the valiant phalanx consisting of De Vigny, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, and others who after many heroic battles established the new school of poetry, which is now admitted to be the best in France.'

Toru made a deep study of the French Revolutionary poets in the British Museum when she was in London. She was most partial to the Romantics and exulted in their freedom of ima-



gination and the rights of the individual. The nineteenth century was free from the seventeenth and eighteenth century restrictions of forms of verse and rules. Toru felt that seventeenth century classicism was servile to the models of Greece and Rome. The romantics were simple, direct and vivid. But Toru does not abandon the French Renaissance poets. She delves even further back than Chénier, Courier, Béranger and Lamartine to Parny and de Florian of the eighteenth century, or Corneille and Scarron of the seventeenth century, and even back to the sixteenth. These introduce the modern poets. Hugo is given the place of honour in the *Sheaf* for there are thirty translations. Next in popularity are Musset, the Compté de Gramont and Josephin Soulayr.

Looking back across the years, and turning over the pages of the *Sheaf* the inevitable question one asks is whether Toru's translations would have been credited with as much popularity today as they were nearly a hundred years ago. One would like to believe that this young girl of the puritan Victorian age, with all the limitations of her Indian social environment, was nevertheless able to surpass all the inhibitions of her age, and would even in these days of the *avant garde* poetry of post-Eliot out-pourings, be read with pleasure. If not for her archaic rhymes and rhythms, her persistence in out-dated modes of punctuation which at times are 'chaotic,' her old-world morals and insistence on the acceptance of the soul and God as the main themes of her verse, she would almost be able to hold her own even in the poetic world of today, for she has grappled with the truth, as all poets of all ages do, and, therefore, she will live on. She did not stop at merely producing pretty lyrics and concentrate on the beauty of the sound of words alone, as perhaps was the style of that other great Indian poetess, who wrote in English—Sarojini Naidu. Toru's poems, though slight, which at times ignore the rules of prosody, are classical in style and rich and mellifluous. We cannot help feeling that if Toru lived today, she would still write poetry. How else was she so fascinated with the poetry of the Parnassian school, with Baudelaire, Sainte Beuve and others. She was a rebel at heart. There

was a spirit in her which was akin with them, and likewise she would perhaps have been a part of T.S. Eliot's world. But she would never have been a part of the Permissive Society of today.

The saddest note of all in the *Sheaf* is about Aru. Toru writes: 'Had she lived this book with her help might have been better, and the writer might perhaps have had less reason to be ashamed of it, and less occasion to ask for the reader's indulgence. Alas!'



## 14. Novels

AFTER Toru's death, Govin Chunder found the manuscript of a French novel by Toru along with other unpublished material, and sent it to Mlle Clarisse Bader in August 1878. The French author recalled later: 'It was not without deep emotion that I received the copy of the ms entirely written out by the old father. "My hand is not steady, and I have to copy slowly", he wrote, but nothing in the beautiful and energetic writing betrays the trembling hand. The father has gathered strength to accomplish this bitter-sweet task from the illusion which it creates. "While I am writing," he stated, "I feel as though I were speaking with her."' "

Clarisse wrote the Introduction to the novel, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle D'Arvers*, and saw through its publication in French.<sup>1</sup> This memoir, written by the loving hand of a friend Toru had never seen, is full of sadness and admiration for the young girl. 'She did not stop with translations alone,' wrote Clarisse of Toru. 'She herself wished to be a French writer and she wrote a novel in French which we publish today. Toru was not bound down by the love of French and its literature, but she loved the country France and showed this love when France was in agony.'

The French novel is an effort on Toru's part to depict scenes from French society in the sixties of the nineteenth century and is interesting because of the astonishing revelation it gives of the mind and accomplishments of the writer. A Dutch reviewer remarked: 'Nothing in the book betrays the fact that the writer was a foreigner.' Her biographer, Harihar Das, is more lyrical: 'We question if, in the whole of the history of literature, another such example can be found of a foreign language being so completely mastered in so short a time that the production

of an entire book in that tongue was possible, and that too, in the finished style which this book displays.'

The novel, which is in the form of extracts from the diary of a French Catholic girl covers the period of a year and half from the time when Marguerite, the heroine, leaves her convent to her premature death. Her illness and death are the epilogue. The book begins with the pretty prattle of a young girl whose heart is filled with simple joys unclouded by sorrow. She is the only child of a retired general and his wife living in Brittany. She returns home to celebrate her fifteenth birthday, and at the party she meets a widowed countess and her two sons.

Three days later, a young officer, Louis Lefèvre, visits their home. Her parents want her to marry Lefèvre, but Marguerite refuses, for she has fallen in love with Count Dunois, and his mother, the Countess, approves of the match. But Dunois and Gaston, the younger brother, both fall in love with the maid Jeanette, a village girl, whom Marguerite had earlier sent to the Countess. Dunois kills his brother in a fit of jealousy and is condemned to penal servitude. He commits suicide and the Countess goes mad.

Marguerite falls seriously ill and later marries Louis, to please her parents. She feels a premonition of her early death but is resigned to her fate. A deep love for Louis develops and they live happily for a short while at Nice. Marguerite returns home to give birth to her baby and dies, leaving a son.

The story is 'awful but not gruesome' and is free from sordid details. Though melodramatic, 'a high-toned spirit pervades the whole novel.' The few characters are clearly portrayed. Marguerite is a little too mature for her age and perhaps not quite true to life. Her faith in Providence, her appearance, the environment in which she lived and many other details are all subjective, and may have been a description of Toru herself. Her sister Veronica could easily have been a portrait of Aru. For this reason, the novel is convincing and holds the attention of the reader. Reviews were good. M Adrien Desprez felt that the 'writer has poured all the treasures of a young and loving girl' into the book. M Garcin de Tassy,<sup>2</sup>



who knew Toru through Clarisse and whose admiration for her was deep, also paid her a glowing tribute.

Two complete translations of the novel have appeared in Bengali, one by Rajkumar Mukherjea and the other by Prithwindranath Mukhopadhyaya. It is interesting to read Rajkumar Mukherjea's comments on Toru and her novel in his *Kavi Toru Dutt*.<sup>3</sup> He feels that Toru's form of writing was essentially Indian. For this reason, because she was true to her background, she was appreciated both in England and India. What was surprising was that, though many Indians were beginning to write in English, this novel was in French, and written by a Bengali girl. He thinks that, as the plot is out of the ordinary, Toru may have come across some human parallel around which she based her book. It is hardly a plot she could have conjured up herself. According to James Darmesteter, the events related by Toru actually happened to a family in England. Two brothers were in love with the same girl and out of jealousy, one killed the other, but it is not known when this tragedy actually happened and Mr Mukherjea points out that Darmesteter does not mention whether Toru was in England at the time. Neither is it clear whether she started the novel in England when the two sisters had decided, one to write and the other to illustrate the book. But as no illustrations were ever found, in all probability Toru wrote the book after Aru's death. Mr Mukherjea feels that Toru's mastery of French could not have been so perfect when she was still in England, but this is a matter of doubt, as Toru was studying French deeply at the time. According to James Darmesteter, the novel was written when Toru was eighteen years old, that is, in 1874, the year her sister died. It was strange that Toru never once mentioned the novel to Mary in her letters. The plot might have been suggested to her after hearing one of her mother's stories. That of Sunda and Upasunda, the demon brothers, who fell in love with Tilattoma and died fighting each other, might have been another source, as Mr Mukherjea points out.

The obsession of premature death must have possessed Toru, and she wrote her novel in secret, as she never cared to mourn

aloud the tragedy of her family before other people. But through Marguerite, she was able to give vent to some of her pent-up feelings, for what engrosses the reader is not the source of the plot or its melodrama but the course of Marguerite's development and her early death--so like the fate of the author herself, for the book was published posthumously, after the world came to know of Toru's own early demise.

The craving for motherhood evinced by Marguerite may well have been Toru's own longing for strength and long life to marry and bear children. Though she is never known to have loved any one or to have thought of marrying, an unconscious desire for the love of a husband and children must have been hers, like that of any normal woman.

James Darmesteter and Edmund Gosse both compare Toru with the great women novelists of the day. Toru was much taken by the sad life of the Bröntes after reading Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brönte*. She wrote to Mary: "To think of those three young sisters in that old parsonage, among the lonely wild moors of Yorkshire, all three so full of talent, and yet living so solitary among those Yorkshire wolds!" Two elder sisters of Charlotte had already died of phthisis. How like the Brönte heroines was the character of Marguerite! Her whole book reflects the gentle manners and fatalistic outlook of Victorian heroines. Jane Eyre or Lucy in *Villette* could well have been a character portrayed by Toru. The similarity between her style, though she wrote her novel in French, and those of Jane Austen or George Eliot are unmistakable. And she foreshadows her own sad end when she wrote of the Bröntes: "How dreary for the father to see one by one all those children die, to live on alone and infirm in that solitary parsonage in Yorkshire! In truth there is no greater tragedy in fiction than what happens in our real, daily life."

Toru's second novel, *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden*, was a fragment. Eight chapters were discovered by Govin Chunder after Toru's death and they were published in serial form in the *Bengal Magazine* from January to April 1878. A footnote by Govin Chunder runs as follows: "The gentle hand



that had traced the story thus far—the hand of Miss Toru Dutt—left off here. Was it illness that made the pen drop from the weary fingers? I do not know. I think not. The sketch was a first attempt probably, and abandoned. I am inclined to think so, because the novel left in the French language is very much superior indeed to this fragment and is complete. Other fragments there are, both in prose and verse, but mostly rough-hewn and unpolished.’<sup>4</sup>

The plot of *Bianca* is tragic, as is the *Journal*. It is written in English. Bianca Garcia is the youngest and only surviving child of a Spanish gentlewoman settled in an English village. The story starts with the death of Inez, Bianca’s elder sister, and the funeral on a cold February day. Bianca and her father mourn the death. Bianca is overcome with grief and Martha, her Scottish maid, persuades her to try and forget the loss. After a year Mr Ingram, her dead sister’s fiancé, wants to marry her. In the meanwhile, her own father has died. Mr Ingram still loves Inez, and they meet at this time Lady Moore and her son and daughter. Bianca falls in love with Lord Moore, the son. There are family objections to the marriage with Lord Moore, who goes off to the Crimean war. Here the story breaks off. This fragment of a novel seems unduly melodramatic and tragic. Perhaps Toru herself felt it was too gloomy to continue and began her French novel which at least gives the heroine a short respite of happiness, though too suddenly broken. In *Bianca* the death of an elder sister clouds her thinking and produces a strain of morbidity which was not true to Toru’s character after Aru’s death.

## 15. Ballads and Legends

WHEN Toru wrote her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* a hitherto half-open lotus was now able to blossom out in the rays of the Oriental sun in full bloom. However much Toru loved England and France, she was subconsciously never at home in writing about these countries or in translating their literature, and it was only when she gathered a Sheaf in Sanskrit fields that her real poetic worth awoke. As Edmund Gosse commented: '*The Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* is certainly the most imperfect of Toru's writings, but it is not the least interesting.' About her original English poems he said: 'We believe that the original English poems ... will be ultimately found to constitute Toru's chief legacy to posterity. These ballads form the last and most matured of her writings.'

The first edition of the *Ballads* was published in London in 1882 by Messrs Kegan, Paul, Trench & Co. with an 'Introductory Memoir' by Edmund Gosse dated 1881. Since then five editions have been printed, the last one in 1927 by the same publishers. Another edition was published by Kalidas & Co. and printed in Madras. There is no date given to this edition, and Gosse's Introductory Memoir is omitted. It contains a publisher's note of no value.

In his Introductory Memoir, Gosse says: 'If Toru Dutt were alive, she would still be younger than any recognized European writer, and yet her fame, which is already considerable, has been entirely posthumous.' The *Ballads* brought Toru home to rest in a world of her own.

E. J. Thomas comments that, as in the case of Keats, a persistent voice kept sounding in her ears admonishing her with the words: 'What thou doest, do quickly,' and that after Aru's death she was even more in a hurry. 'Yet, even amid the many



marks of immaturity and haste, there are signs that she would have escaped before long from many of her prosodic limitations." Her greater faults would have been removed by experience, for they were not too deeply rooted. Mr Thomas continues: "The *Ballads* are that portion of her work which has most chance of some sort of permanence for its own sake." They were 'careless and diffused, yet binding the whole into unity.' 'But the fact remains, of carelessness, and, what is more serious, lack of sympathy in the author. She stands outside her themes and does not enter deeply into them.' Thomas may be judging Toru in this instance too much as a foreigner, and does not seem to quite understand that, despite Toru being a Christian, she was certainly able thoroughly to become a part of the Hindu themes of which she wrote. Neither could the ancient Indian myths ever be old and primitive or lacking in 'first-class value.' The stories Toru chose were quite well-known and spoke of an ancient culture and heritage, as traditional as the Greek legends. Toru herself commented: 'The Sanskrit is as old and as grand a language as the Greek.' Toru also had the advantage over the writers of today in being among the first to be able to present Sanskrit themes to a foreign world. Thomas himself admits that 'Toru remains one of the most astonishing women that ever lived, a woman whose place is with Sappho and Emily Brönte, fiery and unconquerable of soul as they.'

Toru's interpretations of Hindu ethics are entirely sympathetic, except in one instance in 'The Royal Ascetic' when she feels that the Royal sage should not give up his love for things of this world completely:

but we, who happier, live  
Under the holiest dispensation, know  
That God is Love, and not to be adored  
By devotion born of stoic pride,  
Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard,  
But with a love, in character akin  
To His unselfish, all-including love.

Toru insisted that little sympathy could be offered to the

Brahman who implied that King Bharat had committed a sin because he loved his pet deer too much. There is not a sign otherwise of Toru not being entirely in sympathy with the ancient world of India.

Thomas commented, justifiably one feels, that Toru's adjectives and thought 'are second-hand and otiose'. Certainly she was in the unfortunate habit of using redundant adjectives, often to make up the rhythm. Her punctuation, too, abounds in commas, dashes and semi-colons. But her *Ballads* run much more smoothly and do not 'limp' as much as her French translations and are at the same time almost inspired. Toru gazes at the sea of rich Sanskrit literature before her like Cortez in Keats' sonnet:

... When with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

It is again the case of what might have been when Toru was denied the life span to study deeper the treasures of her own classical language.

In spite of her many faults, mostly due to her immaturity, Toru's poems are strong. Here, for instance, are two of the many beautiful stanzas from the *Ballads*:

Oh, lovely are the woods at dawn,  
And lovely in the sultry noon,  
But loveliest, when the sun withdrawn  
The twilight and the crescent moon  
Change all asperities of shape,  
And tone all colours softly down,  
With a blue veil of silvered crape!  
Lo! By that hill which palm-trees crown,  
Down the deep glade with perfume rife  
From buds that to the dews expand,  
The husband and the faithful wife  
Pass to dense jungle,—hand in hand.



I know in such a world as this  
 No one can gain his heart's desire,  
 Or pass the year in perfect bliss;  
 Like gold we must be tried by fire;  
 And each shall suffer as he acts  
 • And thinks,—his own sad burden bear!  
 No friends can help,—his sins are facts  
 That nothing can annul or square,  
 And he must bear their consequence.  
 Can I my husband save by rites?  
 Ah, no,—that were a vain pretence,  
 Justice eternal strict requites.

But though the beginning of both the above quoted verses are very lovely, Toru seems to be unable to sustain the beauty and richness of the lines for long. By the end of the stanza, the words definitely 'limp' and the music of the lines is spoilt in order somehow to proceed with the narrative.

Toru respected the gods of ancient India, and her praise of Yama and other deities is everywhere evident. There is deep reverence for an old faith and Toru's Christianity does not in anyway clash with it. She was the true Christian in that she did not look on other religions with narrow eyes. She was the genuine daughter of Hinduism in that she was not dogmatic, but broad-minded and tolerant.

Though Toru's 'lays' are 'steeped in Hindu sentiment and tradition' and 'though her poetry is essentially of her race and her country', some critics feel that Toru was not able to reproduce the rich Sanskrit language in English. 'The old Ballads and Legends have lost all their plaintive cadence, all the natural charm they bore when wrapped with the full-sounding music of the Sanskrit or in what lay ready to the hands of the poetess, her own classical Bengali.

'The imagery, the scenery has even lost its own colour and profusion and ornamentation. The warmth of expression and sentiment has of necessity been toned down by the very use of a language which, even had it been plastic in the hands of

Toru Dutt, could never have afforded her the delicate touch and colour which she found in the French.<sup>1</sup>

On reading Kalidasa, Bana or any of the Sanskrit writers, there is a flowery phraseology, an excess of praise of the hero and heroine, a magnificence in the descriptions of the grandeur of the gods and kings, a profusion and splendour of nature which Toru has not been able accurately to reproduce, for she has modernised and shortened her translations to suit a foreign audience. But she will nevertheless be termed a classical writer, because the legends themselves are classical and epic. Toru also was one of those leaders of literature who 'at a time when Bengal was held in low esteem in Europe, raised it high among the nations of the West. In days when Bengalis were losing heart and despairing of themselves and their country, she turned deliberately from the paths of foreign song to write of the stories of her own motherland.'<sup>2</sup>

Considering the stories as they appear in the fifth edition of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, Savitri is the longest and the most popular. The verses are dignified and to the point. Nature is described in all its grandeur and the octo-syllabic quartets are not monotonous. There is epic grandeur and sublimity, but at the same time the verses are also lyrical and romantic.

The choice of Toru's other poems from the Puranas and epics are individual episodes which are well chosen. Toru's sympathies were with the humble and the insignificant, and the happy culling of these stories adds to their moral strain. In 'Savitri' she brings out her great admiration for the true Indian wife and heroine as she does in 'Sita'. Their steadfastness greatly impressed Toru. 'Lakshman', the second poem, is not as long as 'Savitri' and is a conversation between Sita and her brother-in-law where Sita takes rather an unfair advantage of her staunch guardian's noble nature. 'Jogadhya Uma' is a folk tale which Toru obviously heard from her mother, for she says at the end:

Absurd may be the tale I tell,  
Ill-suited to the marching times,



I loved the lips from which it fell,  
So let it stand among my rhymes.

But the tale itself is very lovely, and a charming folk legend. 'It is a beautiful idea, and there are thousands of such ideas about in our India. Toru did full justice to the appearance of a goddess in the guise of a simple girl.'<sup>3</sup>

'The Royal Ascetic and the Hind' and 'Dhruva' both first appeared in the *Bengal Magazine*. Both the poems are in blank verse, unlike the others, a medium Toru certainly wielded well. Both are from the Vishnu Purana. The first is the story of King Bharat becoming an ascetic and saving a new-born hind from drowning. It becomes his only companion in his lonely life, and he loves it to such a degree that his human weakness tends to hamper his religious austerities. But Toru upholds the right to love, and questions the ethics of abandoning the world entirely, as the sages of India were wont to do.

The legend of Dhruva is well-known. Toru tells it simply and ends:

By prayer and penance Dhruva gained at last  
The highest heavens, and there he shines a star!  
Nightly men see him in the firmament.

Toru's next poem, 'Buttoo', is that of a humble hunter's son who wishes to learn the art of archery from the great Drona-charjya himself. He is scorned by the sage and his royal pupils and retires to a forest where he makes an image of Drona and learns his art with the help of his own devotion to the teacher. But the gallant youth, because he promises his master something that is dearest to him, sacrifices his self-attained skill, to fulfil his word to Arjun, his royal rival. For this, Drona blesses him:

Fame  
Shall sound thy praise from sea to sea,  
And men shall ever link thy name  
With Self-help, Truth, and Modesty.

Thus perhaps has Toru herself earned a name which has lived a hundred years and will continue to be renowned for many more years to come. In her 'pride in her country's great inheritance, she was Indian to the core.' And she herself has become a heritage of India, bringing renown to her motherland through the arches of the years—a name ever to be remembered. Toru, a frail and exotic blossom which bloomed but for a short while, has left a fragrance which will never die.

Among her 'Miscellaneous Poems' published at the end of the *Ballads*, 'Our Casuarina Tree' has proved its own last line, 'May love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.' The poem is ever remembered and often quoted, and as E. J. Thomas remarked, it is 'surely the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner.' It is the most revealing of Toru's verses, with its nostalgia for the past and an 'inner vision' of sublime beauty. This poem alone can number her with the deathless English poets of her age.

### Our Casuarina Tree

Like a huge python, winding round and round  
 The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars  
 Up to its very summit near the stars,  
 A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound  
 No other tree could live. But gallantly  
 The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung  
 In crimson clusters all the boughs among,  
 Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;  
 And oft at nights the garden overflows  
 With one sweet song that seems to have no close,  
 Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown  
 At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;  
 Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest  
 A gray baboon sits statue-like alone  
 Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs  
 His puny offspring leap about and play;  
 And far and near kokilas hail the day;

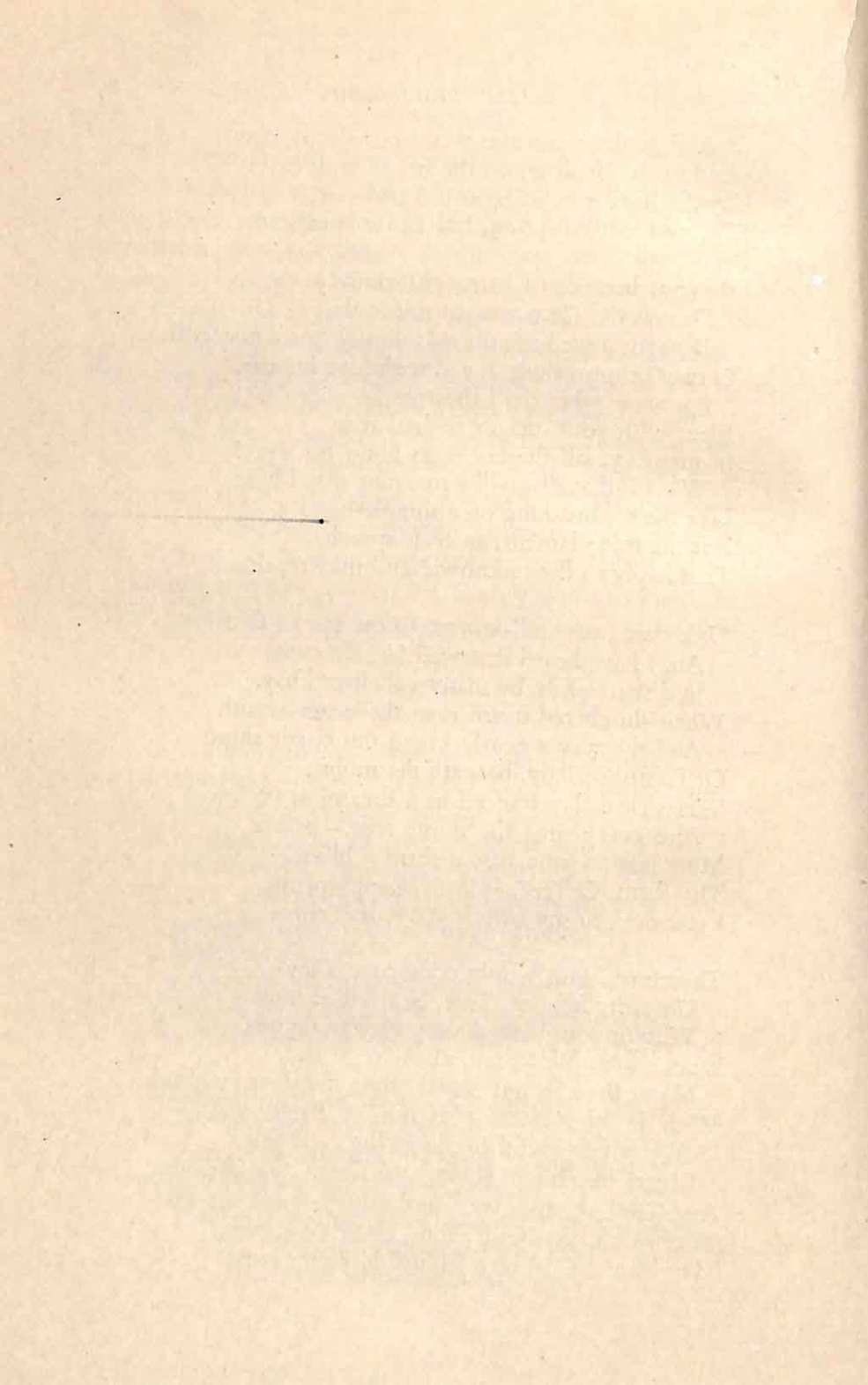


And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;  
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast  
By the hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,  
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence  
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:  
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,  
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,  
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!  
Blent with your images, it shall arise  
In memory, till the hot tears blind my eyes!  
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear  
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?  
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,  
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!  
Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away  
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,  
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith  
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore  
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,  
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:  
And every time the music rose,—before  
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,  
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime  
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay  
Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those  
Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,  
Dearer than life to me, alas! were they!  
Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done  
With deathless trees—like those in Barrowdale,  
Under whose awful branches lingered pale  
“Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,  
And Time the shadow;” and though weak the verse  
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,  
May love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.







## Notes and References

### I

- <sup>1</sup> 'Supplementary Review' by E. J. Thomas in *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* by Harihar Das. O.U.P. 1921, p. 346. Mr E. J. Thomas originally wrote the Review for the *London Quarterly Review*.
- <sup>2</sup> 'This Fragile Blossom' by Alokeranjan Dasgupta in *Indian Literature*, April-June 1966.
- <sup>3</sup> *Indian Writing in English* by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar. Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1962, pp. 51 and 56.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* by Toru Dutt. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., London, 1927, pp. xxiii and xiv.
- <sup>5</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, Foreword by the Rt. Hon. H.A.L. Fisher, p. vii.
- <sup>6</sup> Quoted in *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 1.

### 3

- <sup>1</sup> *Life and Work of Ramesh Chunder Dutt*, C.I.E. by J. N. Gupta. J. M. Dent, London, p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, Appendix III. Bishop Clifford, writing of Mrs Dutt, Toru's mother, said: 'Never shall I forget her triumphant, overcoming faith at the time of her husband's death. She was lifted far above resignation into a truly noble and inspiring joy of spirit. Nor did that faith and courage fail her when her own end drew nigh. Her pain (it was cancer she died of) must have been something which one hardly cares to think of. But she never faltered or allowed herself a murmur.' She partly donated one of the most beautiful churches in India—now in Pakistan—the Church of the Epiphany at Barisal.

### 4

- <sup>1</sup> *Life and Work of Ramesh Chunder Dutt*, p. 4.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ballads*, pp. 79-80.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ballads*, p. 135
- <sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, Appendix II, p. 356.
- <sup>5</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 21.

### 5

- <sup>1</sup> *Essais de Littérature Anglaise*, p. 271, Quoted in *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 21

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 21. Some biographers say that the Dutts visited Italy; but this statement of Mrs Barton's goes to prove they did not visit Italy, for they would scarcely have travelled to that country and not seen Rome. I can also find no direct evidence that Toru ever stepped into Italy.  
—Author.

<sup>3</sup> *Bengal Magazine*, June and July, 1875.

<sup>4</sup> *Ballads*, pp. 129 and 130.

## 6

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Work of Ramesh Chunder Dutt*, p. 4

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 23.

## 7

<sup>1</sup> *Ballads*, pp. 122 and 123.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to *Le Journal to Mlle. D'Arvers*.

## 8

<sup>1</sup> *Ballads* p. XIII

## 9

<sup>1</sup> Renaissance Edition, 3rd Vol., Oriental Series, entitled *The Literature of India*. The Colonial Press N. Y. London, 1900. Edited by Julian Hawthorne.

<sup>2</sup> *Ballads*, p. xiv.

<sup>3</sup> Mr Lal Behari Dey was another early Christian convert, like the Dutts, and a pupil of Dr Duff. He later became a Minister of the Free Mission Church in Cornwallis Street. He was considered a brilliant writer and won a prize of £50 for an English novel. He started to edit the *Bengal Magazine* in 1873 and continued to do so until 1883. Rev. Dey was the author of two well known books, *Bengal Peasant Life* and *Folk Tales of Bengal*. He was a great admirer of Toru's and Aru's poetry.

## 10

<sup>1</sup> *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* by Toru Dutt. A new edition printed and published by B. M. Bose at the Saptahik Sambad Press, Bhowanipore, 1870.

## 13

<sup>1</sup> Ich bringe Blumen mit und Früchte,  
Gereift auf einer andern Flur,  
In einem andern Sonnenlichte,  
In einer glücklichen Natur.



- <sup>2</sup> 'Supplementary Review' by E. J. Thomas in *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*, p. 345.  
<sup>3</sup> *Ballads*, p. xvi  
<sup>4</sup> *Ballads*, p. xvi

## 14

- <sup>1</sup> *Le Journal de Mademoiselle D'Arvers* by Toru Dutt. With a memoir on the life and works of Toru Dutt by Mlle Clarisse Bader. Didier et Co., Paris, 1879. Dedicated to His Excellency Lord Lytton.  
<sup>2</sup> M. Garcin de Tassy, the great Orientalist and lecturer at the School of Oriental Languages in Paris, followed with the keenest interest the progress and education of Indian women and paid a tribute of homage to Miss Mary Carpenter, the great reformer in India. He was a friend to Mlle Clarisse Bader and read with interest Toru Dutt's *Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. Mlle Clarisse Bader in a letter to Toru dated Feb., 1877 says: 'Last evening I showed your letter and your charming collection of poems to an illustrious authority on India, M. Garcin de Tassy, . . He is a friend of your learned neighbour, Rajendralal Mitra.'  
<sup>3</sup> *Kavi Toru Dutt* by Rajkumar Mukherjea (Mukhopadhyaya).  
<sup>4</sup> *Bengal Magazine*, April 1878.

## 15

- <sup>1</sup> *Literary History of India* by R. W. Frazer, Fisher Unwin, 1898, p. 432.  
<sup>2</sup> *The Renaissance of India*, London, 1912.  
<sup>3</sup> *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, September 1906, 'Toru Dutt' by Kamala Sathianadhan.





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